

Interview Collection Part 3

Vin Diesel Ain't Goin' Nowhere: 'Pitch Black,' 'XXX' Sequels In Works

[MTV Movie House](#) Interview
07.31.2002

Think Vin Diesel's bald-pated mug has been inescapable lately? Get used to it, 'cause the charismatic star isn't going away anytime soon.

Though he turned down a role in "The Fast and the Furious 2," Vin Diesel has agreed to headline a series of "Pitch Black" sequels and "XXX2" (or "Triple-X-Squared"), even though the first "XXX" has yet to be released.

"I don't know when I'll do 'XXX2,' " Diesel said. **"Probably early 2004 ... it could be released Christmas 2004, something like that."**

Why the two-year gap? 'Cause Vin's a busy guy.

For starters, he'll be promoting "XXX," in which he plays Xander Cage, an extreme sports athlete and anti-authoritarian who's "recruited" by the Feds for a secret mission. "XXX" was helmed by Rob Cohen, who also directed Diesel's breakout performance in "The Fast and the Furious," which earned Diesel an MTV Movie Award for Best Onscreen Team, which he shared with co-star Paul Walker.

"He's got depth and truth and acting chops," Cohen said of Diesel. **"He's got vulnerability, sweetness and charm. And of course he's got ferocity and anger and can be very dangerous. For the women, of course, he's got a magnificent torso, a deep, gravelly voice, and [he gives off a] sense that he can protect them in all situations. In other words, he's the perfect action hero/ antihero/ leading man."**

Diesel is skipping out on the "Fast and the Furious" sequel to start work on a series of follow-ups to "Pitch Black," the 2000 sci-fi horror flick starring Diesel as a prisoner running amok on a planet full of nasty alien baddies. The three proposed sequels — dubbed "The Chronicles of Riddick" — will focus on Diesel's character.

"[Universal has] opted to not just make a sequel to 'Pitch Black,' but to make a trilogy," Diesel explained. **"[They'll] treat 'Pitch Black' like 'The Hobbit.' You know, call 'Pitch Black' the prequel to this trilogy in the same way 'The Hobbit' is a prequel to 'The Lord of the Rings' [trilogy]. It's incredible what they're doing, what they're coming up with."**

Diesel said that he will start working on the first film in the trilogy in November and that the movies will create **"a whole new mythology. It's insane."**

Before "The Chronicles" get going, the buff baldie will follow his round of "XXX" publicity with some promotion for "Knockaround Guys," a movie he finished over two years ago. New Line will roll the picture out in the fall, just in time to capitalize on all of Diesel's "XXX" hype.

" 'Knockaround Guys' is an ensemble piece," Diesel said, **"with great actors like Dennis Hopper and John Malkovich. It's a low-budget film, and it's just a solid, character-driven piece."**

The movie also pairs Diesel with Seth Green ("Austin Powers in Goldmember"), Barry Pepper ("We Were Soldiers") and Andrew Davoli (HBO's "The Sopranos"), who comprise a group of junior mobsters who botch their first big mission. It's one of two projects the former nightclub bouncer has in the can at New Line; the other is, according to Diesel, **"a very, very dark, introspective character-driven piece."** The as-yet-untitled flick is scheduled to hit theaters on March 7 of next year.

And that's not all. Diesel is also attached to a biopic about Hannibal (the historical figure, not the fictitious cannibal) which he called "Hannibal the Conqueror" and said "will be action, but will also be drama." And of course, there's the inevitable sequel to "XXX."

Diesel said that he can "only imagine" what's in store for the movie both he and Cohen are calling "Triple-X-Squared." Cohen, on the other hand, was much more forthcoming.

"[It will be] bigger, faster, louder, badder," he said. **"We're talking about the continuing adventures of a character whose life is completely altered by this first installment and what happens when he goes home. Things don't work out the way he expects, and he's thrust back into a field of action."**

Cohen promised that he, Diesel and writer Rich Wilkes will all be back for "XXX2." But in the meantime, there's that pesky first movie to get out. "XXX" hits theaters on August 9.

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Triple Threat

[ReQuest Magazine](#)

**Describe XXX to someone unfamiliar with the concept?
XXX redefines the spy genre films.**

Audiences were cheering the trailer of XXX. What makes it so cool?

The trailer was so damn cool, because Xander Cage is an extreme sports specialist who is put in positions where he has to rely on all of his expertise. The reason why the trailer was so damn cool is because the film plays on 100 percent pure adrenaline. It takes patriotism to the max!

Did you do your own stunts? Which stunt was the most kick-ass?

I did a lot of the stunts and they are all high-voltage, but the thing I got a kick out of the most was snowboarding in the Alps and blazing down those snow covered slopes.

What gadgets appear in the film? What was your favorite toy?

I'll keep that as a surprise, but my favorite toy was the GTO. I'm a sucker for a classic car.

You serve as executive producer. What sort of input-creative or otherwise-did you have?

As executive producer I tried to assist the project and make it the best it could be. But the fact that Rob Cohen and I worked on The Fast and the Furious before this made the project that much more enjoyable. Arnie Schmidt, George Zakk, and Todd Garner were all great to work with and made the process that much easier.

Will you continue to produce and develop your own material? In what direction are you moving in future roles-careers?

Yes, I enjoy being a part of the creative team throughout the duration of the film. I imagine that I will continue to do more producing and may not even act in some of the films that I serve as producer. There are so many projects that I like and can't do them all, and producing allows me to be a creative part of more projects.

Historically you have played bad guys. What is the appeal of these characters for you? Any desire to cross over to the other side?

No, I have not played bad guys. Historically I have played antiheroes. I am drawn to them because I think they are more realistic than white-washed heroes. I think we ultimately learn more from these characters.

The Fast and the Furious was a surprise hit. What was its appeal? Does XXX share any similar qualities?

XXX is similar to Fast because it is unrelenting adrenaline, energy, and it is a ride. And it will also have at the core a character that audiences will relate to.

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Diesel Power

[Access Magazine](#)

2002/Aug-Sept issue

.: EDITOR'S LETTER

I really have to move to Los Angeles.

It's not that I don't love Canada. I do. Really. Even though July 1 is just another day off as far as I'm concerned, I take pride every time Mike Myers opens a Number One movie in America (yeah, baby!) and continue to be fascinated by the slew of Canadian musicians making real inroads into the States (congrats, Nickelback, Avril Lavigne, Default, et al.)

But LA is the centre of the entertainment universe, no question. Just try subverting the Hollywood media pecking order when the star is as big (both literally and figuratively) as XXX star Vin Diesel is about to be. Which means that it's to be expected that Vin's adorable mug makes it onto the covers of GQ and Entertainment Weekly. But Access?

Our attempts to secure an interview with Diesel began very early this year with e-mails to George Zakk, Vin's partner at One Race, his production company in Toluca Lake, California. An e-mail merry-go-round ensued, with interview requests cycled between Vin's publicist and manager, Columbia TriStar's US office and, finally, Columbia's Toronto office. In the end, we had a story but no new interview.

Access to Vin — no pun intended — was less restricted in March of 2000. Back then, Diesel and Zakk were on a publicity tour for Pitch Black, a low-budget sci-fi flick with heart, brains and guts. I knew Vin was a star as soon as I saw the movie and arranged an interview and photo shoot with the shorn star-to-be. In person, this ex-nightclub bouncer was tired but still charismatic and forthcoming. I didn't have much time with him but he gave good quote.

Because of the long lead times required by magazines, I wasn't able to use the interview or photos at the time. Fast forward to late summer 2002 and Diesel is about to capitalize on the momentum generated by last summer's hit movie, The Fast and the Furious. Paul Walker was the nominal star of that film but it was Vin Diesel who people remembered. With over US\$144 million at the box office, Furious's success made Vin Diesel the heir to Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bruce Willis. A new action star was born.

So my struggles to secure another interview with Vin were both frustrating and to be expected. Never were this magazine's disadvantages so apparent. The unspoken hierarchy of publicity, whether it's music or film, goes something like this: TV is most important, followed by radio, then print. In print, dailies and weeklies are more important than monthlies, let alone bimonthlies like us. Further complicating things is the fact that American movie studios and record labels often consider Canadian media outlets "foreign" media, and thus subordinate to American media. Call it an extension of Canada's ongoing struggle for recognition and respect from America if you will, I just call it typical.

Meanwhile, thank goodness Diesel hasn't changed his look — bald and bulky — since Richard Sibbald took the dramatic shots that provoked Diesel to write on my Pitch Black press notes "thanks for making me look good."

No problem, Vin. That's what we're here for.

Sean Plummer, Editor

and the old interview

Vin Diesel will get \$20 million to make the sequel to his new film, XXX. Will Sean Plummer get 20 minutes of his time?

The bigger the star, the more elusive they are.

It's a Hollywood dictum that certainly applies to Vin Diesel. Securing an interview with the in-demand star of last year's surprise hit The Fast And The Furious and the upcoming XXX proved impossible, although it wasn't for lack of trying.

E-mails sent this spring to George Zakk, Diesel's production partner, directed us to Karen Samfilippo, his publicist. By the time Ms. Samfilippo called us back, she was no longer working with Vin (among her current clients: Oscar winner Halle Berry), but she did pass Access on to Stacy Boniello, Diesel's manager. A call from her office then put us on to the Los Angeles office of Columbia Pictures, the film's distributor. They referred us back to square one: Columbia's Toronto office. Our rep there did her best to get us Vin but, alas, he continued to prove elusive.

Which is too bad because Diesel is an entertaining and charismatic interviewee. Access spoke to the former nightclub doorman back in February 2000. At that time, he was in Toronto to talk up his lead role as the cold-blooded but conflicted killer Riddick in Pitch Black, a low-budget but high-quality sci-fi monster flick that became a minor hit.

At that time, the New York-born actor, director, screenwriter and producer was tired from the promotional tour. Not too tired, though, to give a hapless newspaper shutterbug grief for not knowing how to shoot him properly. (Access had no such problems.) Diesel reclined on a sofa at the posh Top Of The Senator lounge, waiting for the photog to snap the damn picture. Many poses were suggested and shot down, and the hovering publicist glanced anxiously at her watch. Strained as it was, the smile on Diesel's face looked like it could be worn by a ticking bomb.

And Diesel isn't the type you want to set off. Before getting Hollywood's attention with a small role in Steven Spielberg's WWII epic Saving Private Ryan (written specifically for Diesel at the director's behest), the burly actor worked as a doorman at various hip Gotham nightspots for eight years, disarming potentially volatile situations without benefit of knife or gun. (A script based on the experience and penned by Diesel, called Doormen, is in the works.)

Years of small-time theatre work — "**triple off, off Broadway was a luxury**" — honed Diesel's artistic temperament. He began acting at the age of seven at the Theatre For The New City in Greenwich Village and continued to work in the theatre throughout his youth. Later, he majored in English at Hunter College and soon began writing screenplays. The actor turned writer-director on the low-budget indie projects Multi-Facial and Strays (the 1997 Sundance entry which grabbed Spielberg's attention). But it's in film, not the stage, that

Diesel saw his immediate future.

"I like filmmaking more than theatre," he told me. **"I like the immortality. I like the capability of perfecting it and enhancing the story, reworking a story. You can't do that in theatre. Theatre is a one-shot deal. You get on stage and it begins and that's the experience — and that's cool. I don't know if I need the immediate gratification that the theatre gives. You hear the applause at the end of the production... I don't necessarily need that. I've done that, and some people still get a high off that. I get a high off creating a piece of art that lasts forever."**

Pitch Black went on to garner generally favourable reviews, many of which singled out Diesel's performance, and grossed more than \$40 million, making it a modest success and spurring talk of a sequel. But it wasn't until Diesel's huge success the following summer in *The Fast And The Furious* (which took in over \$144 million on a \$38 million budget) that Universal greenlighted Pitch Black director David Twohy's expansive — and expensive — concept to bring Riddick back in up to three more films. (The first sequel, *Riddick*, is tentatively scheduled to start shooting in October for an October 2003 opening.)

"I'll be honest with you," Diesel said at the time. **"The only idea that [Pitch Black] was going to be a big film was the fact that we were dedicated to making it a big film. Otherwise it could easily have fallen into the trap of being just another sci-fi picture, especially because the budget was so miniscule in terms of sci-fi pictures."**

"When I did Saving Private Ryan, there was the comfort of knowing that Tom Hanks was in it, it was a huge picture and that it would be something that everybody would see, and Spielberg was the director. [Pitch Black] didn't have any of those elements. It was an underdog picture from the start: underdog director, underdog cast, underdog budget. But we made it a point on the set to treat it as though it was going to be something special."

That dedication has paid off for the 35-year-old, who follows up 2001's *Furious* summer with the much-anticipated *XXX* (out August 9). Diesel stars as Xander Cage — aka Triple X — an extreme sports superstar coerced by a secret government agency to help stop a madman intent on destroying the world. Samuel L. Jackson, rapper Eve and Asia Argento co-star. Filmed in LA, Austria and Prague, *XXX* reunites Diesel with his *Furious* director Rob Cohen in a picture Columbia is obviously hoping to turn into a Bond-like franchise. In fact, trade paper *Variety* recently reported that Revolution Studios is already developing a sequel, with Cohen and screenwriter Rich Wilkes signed to reprise their duties. Diesel will be paid \$20 million. (Not bad considering his *Furious* pay cheque was \$2 million.)

And that's not all for Diesel. The Canadian-filmed mob drama *Knockaround Guys* finally comes out this October, while Diesel stars as a DEA officer seeking revenge from the Mexican drug cartel responsible for his wife's death in an untitled action pic directed by F. Gary Gray (*The Negotiator*) which is set to hit theatres next spring. Again, New Line is so confident of its success that it's already hired the film's writers to pen a sequel to star Diesel.

Given his busy schedule and increasing profile, Diesel was in no rush to hurry back to the world of low-budget filmmaking even two years ago. **"I've acted all my life,"** he said. **"I've acted since I was seven-years-old in the theatre. I was most familiar with the acting. The directing is... an opportunity to tell stories, the directing is an opportunity to make statements. That's what attracts me to filmmaking. Filmmaking is by far much more challenging than acting for me, whereas acting is more therapeutic and the acting is something that I have to do. The telling of stories is more of a challenge and more of a luxury, and I'll act in many more films than I'll direct, but I will direct as well. I love both."**

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VIN DIESEL : NEWBREED OF ACTIONHERO

[Prevue Magazine](#)

Few people really know Vin Diesel's real name. The mystery around the shaved-headed actor with the deep voice is almost the same regarding his ethnicity.

"I don't know what I am. Someone tell me what I am! I am a combination of many things," Diesel grins, letting the mystery remain.

Yes, he is a combination -- a combination of charisma, talent and muscle. He's the rare type of actor that men like to cheer for his unrelenting macho persona and women swoon over when he takes off his shirt. Why he even made gorgeous co-star Asia Argento weep in the knees when they shot their on-screen kiss.

"I enjoyed him, what can I say," the sexy Italian actress says with a sly grin. *"When I kissed him, he's a*

actually a really good kisser -- actually one of the best I ever kissed in my life, uh, in a movie I mean."

Sure, we know what you mean.

What makes Diesel different from other young movie hunks? For XXX director Rob Cohen, the actor's appeal is about much more than muscles, a deep voice, and apparently excellent lip control.

"He is the new American," Cohen explains. *"You could look up on that screen and if you are a Hispanic American you see something of yourself in Vin; if you're Afro-American you can see something of yourself in Vin; if you're white American you see something of yourself in Vin; if you're Sephardic Jew you could look up and see yourself in Vin. Vinnie is in many ways a Rorschach test of all races. And all races and ethnic groups look at him and say 'I don't know if he is exactly like me, but there is part of me in him and part of him in me.'"*

"I like the new American," Diesel nods, mulling over the appellation.

Off-screen, Diesel's clearly not the type of action hero that sits around sipping tea. He is more likely to be playing with his dog, a monster-sized mastiff that looks ready for action himself.

"He isn't a normal dog," Diesel grins. **"He's a 170 pound beast! His name is Roman and he's an Italian mastiff. They used these dogs as Roman war dogs back in the second century."**

The mysterious Diesel was born and raised in New York where he started acting while still a kid.

"My mother watched the second plane go into the World Trade Center from the apartment I grew up in," says Diesel, reflecting on how the September 11 tragedy struck at the heart of the world he was born into.

Diesel's stepfather was involved with the stage and soon enough Diesel was part of the off-off Broadway circuit. To step into moviemaking was just a natural progression. His stage name "Diesel" came from the strong physique that made him a bouncer at some of New York's hottest clubs. For three years he earned extra cash and was seen at some of the trendiest spots in the city. The experience has not exactly been helpful in his transition to the movie biz, as the tool of a bouncer is intimidation not ingratiation.

"I don't know if it helped me with the b.s. of Hollywood," Diesel ponders. **"As an actor you want to pull from all your experiences. I think the bouncing actually hurt me the early years I was in Hollywood. When you bounce, you speak with a certain strength, and it's hard to leave that strength behind, even if you are trying to be amiable or pleasant. So, you can come in the room and say, 'Hi, my name's Vin Diesel' and you have the threat of 'If you don't like me, I'll punch you in the face.' Which is not what you want really want to do when you are going out on auditions,"** he adds.

In Hollywood, he had to learn more than just softening his approach in auditions. At first, he found out that having experience in theatre wasn't enough to crack the wall that separates the movie pros from the valet car-parking attendants. He returned home, but he didn't give up. Inspired by other successful low budget productions that turned into hits, he wrote and produced the short-film, Multi Facial. Shot in less than three days at a cost of only \$3,000 the film incredibly made it all the way to the acclaimed Cannes Film Festival.

After such good fortune, Diesel again headed to California and this time he wasn't going to wait for auditions. He raised enough budget to produce his own first feature, Strays. He even directed the feature, which was accepted to another prestigious film festival, this time Sundance. But, as much as it was well received there, the film didn't sell as expected. For the second time, Diesel gave up Hollywood to get back to New York. This would be his last cross-country trip as an unknown. A simple phone call changed all that.

Somehow, director Steven Spielberg took a look at Multi Facial and wanted to meet him. After the interview, Diesel instantly jumped from the indie film world to a choice supporting role in one of Hollywood's biggest blockbuster, Saving Private Ryan. It was all he needed. He landed his first leading role in the sci-fi film Pitch Black and broke through to superstardom in the high-octane actioner The Fast and the Furious.

Unlike some in Hollywood, who follow success with vanity projects to feed their egos, Diesel is most concerned with pleasing his audience.

"You want to make movies for the people, first and foremost."

And in XXX, Diesel again pleases them. Taking his fans on a non-stop thrill ride of action and breathtaking extreme-sport stunts.

With Oscar nominee Samuel L. Jackson as his co-star. Diesel plays tattooed, shaved headed and extremely fearless Xander Cage, also known as agent "XXX." The antiauthoritarian Cage is known for making videos of pure adrenaline, where he does most anything from parachuting from a car as it plunges 700 feet off a bridge, and so on. Picked by the American government to become America's warrior, his mission is to destroy a brutal gang that has been killing people in the Czech Republic city of Prague, including an

undercover American agent.

The movie plunged Vin Diesel the actor into the athletic world of extreme sports and turned him into Vin Diesel the athlete. He trained in a variety of extreme sports, including freestyle motocross and snowboarding. And, Diesel pushed for the chance to do many of his own stunts. Filming sequences with the trained stuntmen for snowboarding jumps in the hair-raising avalanche scene.

"I took him to Innsbruck, Austria and he did the snowboarding for a great deal of the scene, director Rob Cohen explains. "The rail slide over, the halfway house, and the jumps we did in Austria, and he did them!" In fact, Cohen constantly had to reign in his star's passion for action, as an injury to Diesel could torpedo the whole movie.

Looking towards the future, Diesel's now no longer the struggling actor and he has a full plate of projects, including a sequel to Pitch Black, and a star turn as Hannibal, the legendary Carthaginian general who used elephants to cross the Alps to attack the Roman Empire.

"He's a character I've always wanted to play, and not unlike how Mel Gibson wanted to play the Wallace character in Braveheart," he says, obviously relishing the thought of playing a role that could see him on the Oscar podium. **"I can go on for hours talking about how fascinating he is. He redefined war strategies. He was for the 3rd century B.C., for that whole era, he was the classic underdog. He was the only guy who thought of attacking Rome. And he did it in a shrewd way."**

"A shrewd way." It sounds just like how Diesel has attacked and conquered Hollywood.

"I just want to do good work," Diesel protests. **"I want to do quality work. My objective is to take you out of your reality for two hours. Make it effect you."**

--Ana Claudia Paixao

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Latest Action Hero

Vin Diesel makes an xXx-treme leap to stardom.

By J. Sperling Reich

[Reel.com](#)

Back in 1998, one of the primetime news magazines documented the Sundance Film Festival by following the journey of a handful of independent filmmakers whose movies had been selected to appear in competition. All were unknown, fledgling artists hoping that Hollywood might take notice of them up at Sundance. One in particular stood out. He had written, directed and produced a film called Strays, in which he also appeared in the lead role. And if that in and of itself did not clue viewers into the size of his ego, he also bragged about how his appearance at Sundance would rock the industry, for he figured no film would be as good as his or any actor as talented. Every so often the report would cut back to him, mostly as comic relief. In the end, he had received his comeuppance, as Strays did not win any awards, nor was it noticed by Hollywood. That filmmaker's name was Vin Diesel.

While few outside of Sundance ever saw Strays, somehow Diesel's short film, Multi-Facial, wound up in the hands of Steven Spielberg in 1999. When the director saw Diesel in the movie, he immediately set about writing a character for him into his next film, Saving Private Ryan. The first time most audiences saw Diesel was as Private Caparzo storming the beaches of Normandy in Spielberg's instant World War II classic.

That same year, Diesel provided the voice for the title character of the animated film The Iron Giant. By 2000, Diesel's initial prediction of turning Hollywood on its head began to come true. He appeared in the ensemble Wall Street film Boiler Room, alongside Giovanni Ribisi and Ben Affleck, and was the main attraction of the low-budget sci-fi hit Pitch Black.

Though audiences were beginning to recognize Diesel at first glance, they didn't necessarily remember his name. All that changed in 2001, when Diesel, playing a death-defying car thief, headlined a cast of complete unknowns in the sleeper blockbuster, The Fast and the Furious. After that success, the anticipation behind this summer's xXx has been enormous. Again working with his Fast and the Furious director, Rob Cohen, Diesel stars as an extreme-sports athlete recruited by the United States government to go undercover as a spy to break up a renegade group of terrorists.

Even before xXx hit theaters, Diesel had become one of Hollywood's most sought-after action actors. He is set to star in a sequel to Pitch Black, possibly one for xXx, and will appear as the conqueror Hannibal in an

epic period film. As his star continues to rise, Diesel has maintained a cordial relationship with the press and was happy to sit down and talk about xXx and all that he has going on presently.

Q: You do everything but sing. Have ever considered singing?

Vin Diesel: [Starts singing a decent version of "Blue Moon"] I don't think I could sing. I tried to sing. Did any of you see Strays? Multi-Facial? I've done a little singing in some movies. I did a little something in Strays, and I probably do a little singing in Multi-Facial. I'm doing a feature film of Multi-Facial, but doing a singing career? No.

Q: Well it looks like you can perform a few stunts. What was the toughest stunt for you in xXx?

VD: Well, each stunt was difficult. All the stunts were difficult for their own reasons. What I found particularly difficult was on Ahab; I was standing up on Ahab, in the river in Prague, and having to pull this whole missile and turn it around, put it back in. That was very, very difficult because if I would've slipped off, I would have died of hypothermia in 10 minutes.

Q: Are you close with your stunt double and concerned for his safety?

VD: Yeah. There's only a few guys that shave their head and are responsible for putting it all together. I love my stunt guys because I couldn't do — I push the envelope as much as I can. I push the envelope to the point of having the studio come down and saying, "Hold back, Vin. You're pushing too much. You're putting the film in jeopardy." But I couldn't do it without the stunt team.

Q: Are there dimensions to you that might be overlooked because you're on the action-hero path?

VD: I hope not. I hope the fact that I do films like Knockaround Guys ensures that I won't get pigeonholed. It's not the worst thing in the world, you know. What you do with that power or that positioning is up to the artist, so I don't know if I could ever get Hannibal green-lit if I didn't have the box-office response that I've gotten from xXx — or we hope that we'll get from xXx — and The Fast and the Furious.

Q: Do you see the aging action heroes, such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, leaving an opening for you?

VD: I don't know if it's that calculated. I gravitate towards roles that are cool. I'm enrolled conceptually, so Rob, for example — with all the films really — but for xXx, Rob Cohen talked to me about the idea of a nihilist who is recruited by the CIA to save the world. And that concept of this guy who's an antihero becoming a hero was interesting to me.

Q: Why didn't you sign on for Fast and the Furious 2?

VD: Did you see The Fast and the Furious? Yes. Did you see xXx? If you had to choose a franchise, which would you choose?

Q: The question's for you?

VD: If you had to choose, which would you choose? I tend to think that you can't do every single franchise. I think you have to be, at some point, selective. And I think this goes back to — part of ensuring that you don't get caught up in being this monotype actor is having to say no at times and turning some stuff down. While I was shooting Saving Private Ryan, one of the things that Tom Hanks said, he said, "One of the hardest things to learn in this business is how to say no." It was a lot of money, but you've got to stay true to whatever you're doing.

Q: So, why was Riddick, the Pitch Black sequel, something you wanted to stay with?

VD: I always loved the Riddick character. And I think when we did Pitch Black, we had 20 million dollars to do it. I thought that the Riddick character spoke to our generation. It was one of the first times that I saw an audience root for the convict, and I thought that was interesting, the concept of the audience rooting for a guy who's been prejudged, ruled out, and given up, on and misrepresented. The idea of us judging this guy, Riddick, by his action as opposed to his past is interesting to me.

Q: How many films are you slated for now?

VD: They're really going all-out on this one, so they're making a trilogy. If you're familiar with the Tolkien novels, in the same way that The Hobbit is a prequel to The Lord of the Rings, Pitch Black is a prequel to The Chronicles of Riddick.

Q: The next one won't be a prequel to Pitch Black?

VD: No, the next one will be the first installment of a trilogy.

Q: So there will be four total?

VD: There will be three Chronicles of Riddick, and then Pitch Black will be the introduction to the Riddick

character.

Q: What will you deal with in the trilogy?

VD: The universe that Riddick is involved with. It's got this extensive story that [writer-director] David Twohy's putting together. He calls it "the evil Star Wars."

Q: How important is it to keep some sort of mystery around you as an actor and a person?

VD: I think it's important for a few reasons. One is, it's easier for me to become a character and it's easier for me to entertain you as an audience if you have no preconceived — of course that's idealistic — but if you have no preconceived notion of who I am. If I was Bill Clinton and I wanted to play a role in a movie, you'd be like, "Well, I know everything about you," and it would be hard for you to accept me in that character. That's the first reason.

The second reason is I think that as my career has moved forward, I've realized how imperative it is for my own sanity to keep some of my privacy safeguarded. It's a weird experience to have your whole thing exposed. It's really, really a bizarre experience. I was just this kid in New York doing everything. To come into this new world and have the spotlight on me, it's a little bizarre. We used to bounce for many years, David and I used to bounce for nine years together in New York. I don't know if you guys are familiar with the clubs in New York like The Tunnel, Mars, 1018. And when you're bouncing, you adopt this habit of keeping your private world, your personal world safeguarded because of the problems you come across every night when you're working. So, I guess it's also partly that.

Q: But you chased an acting career.

VD: I chased performing and I chased acting. I wanted everything that I am right now. I planned, I worked hard, it's been an arduous road, and I've done everything as dedicated as someone can be. When I came out to L.A., when I was 21 years old and tried to be a star and failed after the year and went back to New York with my tail between my legs, I didn't give up then. I still found another way to do it, and I made a short film. I spent 3,000 dollars of my money at a time when 3,000 dollars was a lot of money. When I could have done things with that, I applied it to a film. I invested it in a film. And I came and worked on the phone telemarketing. A lot of the Boiler Room character comes from me telemarketing, selling tools over the phone.

So, a buddy of mine and I saved \$47,000, and we went to New York and made a film again, when someone else might've bought a new car. So, I always invested in film, and, yeah, I did chase it. I chased it, because in my mind, this is always who I was. I think that sometimes that whole thing about "be careful what you wish for" is a very interesting statement now in my life. But, yeah, I did chase it, and I love what I do. I love more than anything, I love being able to make a movie that takes you out of your reality for two hours.

Q: To what do you attribute your appeal?

VD: I have no idea. I don't know. I don't know. That's a good f**king question. I think about that question every now and then. I have no — it's a bizarre thing, because I'm just a ...

Q: A what?

VD: It's a tricky, tricky situation. Because trying to answer that question, I would just run around in circles and make my head spin. I think that the characters that I have chosen have come around at the right time. I think in the '80s we found that the heroes that were depicted in film were whitewashed heroes. That bled into the '90s. I think that what we're finding now in a world where Eminem is such a high-selling artist, where rap is so prolific and popular, we're at a place where our youth is not anti-government but very outspoken, very independent. I think that my characters came around at the right time, when there is a respect for strength. There's a respect for individuality. I think the characters lend to that frenzy.

Q: Did shaving your head change your appeal?

VD: I think shaving my head was — it's funny that people think it's anything big now because growing up in New York, it's something everybody did. More people shave their head than not. Now, I'm getting kind of thin in some areas and it's a nice excuse to ... a lot of guys that shave their head are either losing their hair or are preparing their immediate surroundings, the people that they know, with the fact that they're going to eventually lose their hair.

Q: Did you ever try a comb-over and it just didn't work?

VD: Aside from it being a stylish thing, it's one of those things you just get caught up in. Once you shave your head, you never go back, really.

Q: In this movie, were you conscious of doing hero poses?

VD: Not at all. It's cool that you said that, but not at all. When I play a character, I play a character.

Q: What do you enjoy most about your celebrity

VD: The ability to be able to do Hannibal. The ability to be able to do films. There's a bunch of things I enjoy

Q: What do you enjoy outside of work?

VD: Part of me would want to say to be a role model, but I don't know if I'm equipped to be a role model. I don't know if I'm that together to be a role model. I imagine that with this much celebrity, you have an opportunity to promote change.

Vin Diesel Taking Fast, Furious Ride To The Top In Stride

MTV.com

08.01.2002

With his shaved head dominating magazine racks and his "extreme" secret-agent thriller "XXX" storming into theaters next week, there's no denying that Vin Diesel has been welcomed by Hollywood, the media and fans as the new #1 action hero.

"I think there's going to be a changing of the guard," Diesel acknowledged. "But you know, my objective is just to, you know, do good work. And I know that sounds corny, but that's truly the objective."

Though Diesel insisted that he puts the same amount of passion into dramatic acting as he does into action posturing, he's well aware of his place in the action-hero hierarchy. And he has no problem acknowledging his influences in the genre.

"[Growing up,] I loved them all," he said. "Stallone [and] Schwarzenegger were amazing. [I'm] a huge Mel Gibson fan [and] John Wayne. I liked action heroes before they were called action heroes. You know, when they made 'Rebel Without a Cause,' when they made 'On the Waterfront' or 'The Wild One' there wasn't the title 'action hero.' That's kind of a new title that Stallone and Schwarzenegger brought to the public."

Whatever they're called, the old-timers have been disappearing from the spotlight lately. Gibson has slowed down the "Lethal Weapon" series to make movies like the upcoming alien mystery "Signs." Arnold Schwarzenegger's latest action flicks — "Collateral Damage" and 1999's "End of Days" — floundered at the box office. "Driven" featured Sylvester Stallone and fast cars (and Burt Reynolds!), but it had nothing on the sexy appeal of "The Fast and the Furious."

This summer has been abuzz with talk of "the new action star." There's a whole new crop of guys using buff muscles, suave features and even (gasp!) acting chops to save the world in a handful of explosion-laden flicks, from Matt Damon's surprisingly convincing tough guy turn in "The Bourne Identity" (see "Will Matt Damon's 'Bourne' Be The Next Bond?") to his pal Ben Affleck's take on CIA man Jack Ryan in "The Sum of All Fears" (see "Spies, Bombs, Afros Hitting Theater Near You"). Chief among them seems to be Vin Diesel, who parlayed his breakout success in "The Fast and the Furious" into a fat executive producer credit and headlining role in "XXX."

Diesel's got the looks, he's got the charisma and he's got the body to pull off just about any stunt convincingly. But unlike Arnold, Vin's road to action-hero success didn't start on the bodybuilding circuit.

"I started acting when I was 7 years old," Diesel said. "I only started working out because I was bouncing at night to support the daytime dream of being an actor. So while I was out going on auditions during the daytime, I was bouncing at night. And because of that I had to train and I had to work out. ... It was a byproduct of bouncing."

Diesel worked for years, setting aside the money he made throwing ruffians out of nightclubs to finance his own small films, including 1994's "Multi-Facial" and 1997's "Strays," both of which he wrote, directed, produced and starred in.

Steven Spielberg saw "Multi-Facial" and ended up writing a role for Vin in 1998's World War II blockbuster "Saving Private Ryan." Soon he found himself voicing "The Iron Giant," drawing on his own real-life sales experience for "Boiler Room" ("I had to work a whole year telemarketing to make the money to do 'Strays' ") and appearing as Riddick in "Pitch Black." The rest, as they say, is history.

"XXX" hits theaters August 9. After that, Diesel already has "XXX2" in the works, among a slew of other projects (see "Vin Diesel Ain't Goin' Nowhere: 'Pitch Black,' 'XXX' Sequels In Works"), all of them ensuring that his bouncing days are far behind him.

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Vin Diesel/XXX Interview by Paul Fischer in Los Angeles

[Dark Horizons](#)

2002-08-02

There was a time when you could not shut up Vin Diesel. The 35-year old native New Yorker, who first attained recognition through his work in the likes of Saving Private Ryan and Pitch Black, is now more guarded and surprisingly introspective. More questioning than he once was when the actor first began giving interviews for Ryan, Diesel enjoys responding to one's questions with another question. That, it seems, is Diesel's new media trademark, a way perhaps to deflect attention away from the star, or a means to seek approval from a prying press. His latest film, XXX, casts Diesel as an initially reluctant secret agent in the visceral Hollywood actioner. When asked if it's perhaps his coolest film that he has done thus far, Diesel's smiling response is a mere **'What do YOU think'?** Cool enough, but with women screaming for more when the hunky actor takes his shirt off in the movie, Diesel begrudgingly admits **"that's not a bad thing, right?"** Perhaps he is a bit embarrassed by the kind of attention that Diesel is attaining. As the song goes, he's come a long way baby. A long way indeed, since the ex-bouncer's foray into screen acting with Saving Private Ryan. Diesel admits that he never expected to be in the position this most reluctant of stars finds himself in, complete with sex symbol tag and all. **"As a kid I wasn't a pretty boy and was never being chased by women, so I guess it's a different thing having that happen to you later in life."** Recent magazine articles have consistently defined Diesel as Hollywood's first multi-racial hero, the big, new action star, Hollywood's latest sex symbol and that he's poised on the brink of superstardom. Labels, he says, that are flattering but which he tries not to take too seriously. **"Look, I literally just go and make movies that I hope will take you out of your reality for a couple of hours,"** Diesel insists with a hint of exasperation in his voice. **"That is my sole objective, as an actor and filmmaker and as someone who's been dedicated to this for almost 30 years. All of those labels don't really matter much to me; the key is, that I have the ability to make movies."** As to the suggestion that Diesel is taking the mantle from the likes of Stallone and Schwarzenegger, Diesel expresses genuine surprise at the similarities. **"In some ways it's amazing, because first of all Rocky is one of the best movies of all time and Schwarzenegger made movies that empowered me as a kid."**

Successor to those guys or not, Diesel's star is likely to rise even further once his latest film, the fast and furious spy actioner XXX opens. Diesel stars as former extreme sports athlete Xander "XXX" Cage, notorious for his death defying public stunts. Betting he can succeed where other conventional spies have failed, Xander is recruited by NSA Agent Gibbons (Samuel L. Jackson) to become a different kind of undercover agent. Enlisted for a dangerous covert mission, he must use all his extreme skills to combat a clever, organized, and ruthless enemy far beyond the scope of his experience. Though comic book in tone, Diesel admits to an understanding of the anti-establishment spy character he plays here. **"When we create these characters, during that process of character construction, we have to pull from parts of our own personality, however minute they are,"** Diesel explains. **"Have I ever felt like a nihilist as times? Maybe and then I take that and expand it to this type of character."** For XXX, however, Diesel put more into this character and movie than anyone was expecting, including **"being far more involved in the stunts than the studio would have liked,"** he admits, smilingly. **"Which was an issue on certain occasions."** Diesel, a sports and physical fitness fanatic, was at least able to fulfil certain fantasies, by learning how to motocross and engage in other extreme sports activities. Tough as it was, he thrives on that arduous preparation, for the sake of the work. **"What I thrive on is getting the character right, because even in the training process I took more liberties than I normally would have."** That's because, Diesel argues, he wants **"this character to sing, to live and be believable. I want this character to know what it's like to spin a bike around."** Of course, it wasn't all hard work. Shooting on location in Prague, a city known for its good beer and exuberant nightlife, when asked if he took advantage of what the city had to offer after hours, Diesel merely grins broadly/ **"Oh, I was an awfully good boy."**

Born in New York City, Diesel was drawn to acting at a young age and made his stage debut at age 7. Surprisingly, the young would-be actor was a self-confessed Dungeons and Dragons fan as a child, and admits to still using that role-playing ethos in his approach to acting today. **"I've used that part of me that was a huge fan of that as a child in the storytelling aspect of moviemaking"**, explains Diesel, who has also directed both a short and a well received feature film. That was then, this is now, and Diesel's life could well change dramatically as a result of the likely success of XXX. In trying to communicate how he feels about the exploding celebrity status which a blockbuster such as this could impose on the actor, Diesel begins to question just that. **"That's a good question. How COULD I prepare myself?"** he muses. **"I wish there was a book or something to prepare your fucking self because I just don't know"**, he says with a genuine frustration in his voice. He even tried asking advice from stars he had worked with, such as Tom

Hanks. **"Their advice isn't that good"**, he laughingly admits. **"I don't think there's anything you can do and to be honest, I don't think about that. You have to believe that what I care about is doing the work."** This is why he won't read what is written about him. Too many misconceptions, he insists. **"Too many for me to mention"**, he insists, smilingly. **"The best thing about being in this new-found position is the ability to get films green-lit."** Films as diverse as the biography of Hannibal, who is far away from XXX as one can imagine.

Or Diesel's revisiting of his Riddick character in not one, but two films based on Pitch Black, to be possibly shot in Australia later this year. **"Pitch Black will serve as the prequel the same way as The Hobbit was a prequel to Lord of the Rings"**, Diesel says. **"The two films will form part of a Riddick trilogy."** Diesel may be Hollywood's reluctant star, but at least he is having a good time going back to his Dungeons and Dragons days, reliving a childhood fantasy that remains inherent in Diesel's boyish psyche.

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Vin Diesel Discusses His Background, His Role Philosophy Triple X Full Of Action

August 2, 2002

By RON DICKER, Special to The Courant

[CTNow.com](#)

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. -- Has Vin Diesel become an action hero so he can ride elephants? Diesel, who struts his brainy brawn in "XXX," believes the limitations of the action genre aren't really limitations at all.

"It's not the worst thing in the world," he says in a recent interview. **"What you do with that power is up to the artist. I don't think I could have had 'Hannibal' greenlit if I didn't have the box office."**

Diesel is referring to Hannibal the elephant-riding general, whom he recently signed to play in a deal struck by his production company. Hits like last summer's "The Fast and the Furious" and "Pitch Black" (2000) have given Diesel industry muscle to match his ripped physique.

In "XXX," opening Aug. 9, Diesel's Xander Cage pulls fuel-injected, adrenaline-addled stunts for a website before he is recruited to save the world. He must infiltrate a gang of Russians who love babes and anarchy, not to mention chemical weapons.

Diesel's heroes are punks sprung from the video-game zeitgeist. In "The Fast and the Furious," Diesel stole cars and raced them in the streets. "Pitch Black" presented him as a convict-turned-savior.

Sony-Columbia gambled \$10 million on him to play Agent XXX, a large sum for a relative newcomer. A sequel will follow unless the original crashes and burns. He also is slated for a "Pitch Black" sequel called "Riddick," to hit screens next year.

"I think that the characters I've chosen have come around at the right time," the 35-year-old Diesel says in his husky echo. **"I think in the '80s we found that the heroes depicted in film were whitewashed heroes and that bled into the '90s. I think what we're finding now is a world where Eminem is such a high-selling artist, where rap is so prolific. ...There is a respect for strength and individuality."**

The PR machine has touted Diesel as the new James Bond, but the actor tries to distance himself from the British spy franchise. Diesel says Bond had rich parents, went to the right schools and enlisted in His Majesty's Secret Service for God and country. Xander Cage of "XXX" has no such roots, no noble motivation and he wouldn't go to school unless he could parachute into it.

Diesel jokes that he wants to create harmony in the Playstation world. But then he makes a serious point: an action movie can no longer thrive without a joystick mentality.

The actor says he is not equipped to be a role model off-screen. After spending most of his youth in New York, he has settled in Los Angeles. His dog is a Cane Corso named Roman. He apparently does not ascribe to the lone-wolf life of his characters. He has a girlfriend, whom many suspect is the rapper Eve, who appears in "XXX." Diesel deflects the rumor by calling her a very special friend. **"One of the things that's so fun is that we can go on the Internet and find out who I was dating,"** says Diesel, who was spotted dining with Nicole Kidman last week.

He's been a movie star for what seems like 10 minutes, but Diesel cut the information flow a while ago. Some of the topics that are off-limits today are his real name and his mixed heritage.

"It's easier for me to become a character, to entertain you, if you have no preconceived notions of who I am," says Diesel, wearing smoked sunglasses, a white V-neck T-shirt and a freshly shaven head. **"The second reason is I think that as my career moves forward, I realize how imperative it is for my**

own sanity to keep my privacy safeguarded."

On this occasion, Diesel opens up a little about his childhood. Although his adoptive father ran a theater in Greenwich Village, Diesel broke into a nearby theater to wreck the place. A heavysset woman directed the spotlight on him and told him if he wanted to play, he should arrive everyday at 4 o'clock and that he would receive \$20 a week. **"Know your lines,"** she told him.

"That was the first time I could make a whole audience laugh without being sent to the dean's office," Diesel recalls.

Diesel worked as a bouncer for many years and tried college for a while, but dropped out. He moved to Los Angeles at age 21 and was back in New York within a year. His mother, an astrologer, gave him a book on low-budget filmmaking. Diesel made a short, "Multi-Facial" (1994), and it was screened at the Cannes Film Festival. He then returned to Los Angeles, rustled up \$50,000 through telemarketing jobs and made "Strays," which was selected for the 1997 Sundance Film Festival.

"Strays" floundered in the indie market, but Diesel struck gold when Steven Spielberg cast him in "Saving Private Ryan" after seeing him in "Multi-Facial." An acting career had begun. A star wasn't born, however, until Diesel became the bad guy who beats the bad guys.

"It's not that calculated," he says. **"I gravitate toward roles that are cool."**

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Vin Diesel: Hollywood's New Anti-hero

By Vanessa Sibbald

Fri, Aug 02, 2002

[Zap2it.com](#)

Vin Diesel is running late. The brawny actor, who barely would have raised eyebrows a year ago, is a very wanted man these days, which leads to waiting nearly four hours for an interview at the Four Seasons Hotel (to be fair, Diesel is only one hour late).

By 6 p.m., a publicist comes in the waiting area and grabs couple of Red Bulls for "Vinnie" -- as "XXX" director Rob Cohen calls him. Diesel has been up since early in the morning doing interviews for his newest film, "XXX." No doubt the Red Bulls will give him enough kick to get him through the rest.

About two hours later, when Diesel finally walks into the room with his entourage, he looks fit, relaxed and in fact more alive and at ease than when I first saw him at noon, when he was being grilled by six journalists at one time all crammed into a tiny room at the hotel.

Don't let the big muscles and the attitude fool you, Diesel is not only smart, but he's also as nice as can be. Wearing a casual shirt and jeans he apologizes for his tardiness as he sits down on the couch and makes himself comfortable.

Maybe it comes from the fact that he's from New York, or that he once worked as a bouncer, but despite his light-speed rise to fame, Diesel (a name he gave himself when he worked as a bouncer), comes across as immediately accessible and very grounded.

"I feel like there's some kind of integrity thing that I don't know if I get from being from New York or from my parents or from my friends, but there's an integrity, an artistic integrity that I try to hold strong to and stay loyal to," he tells Zap2it on how he keeps his cool in Hollywood.

Diesel, 35, got his first big break as a director. Frustrated at the lack of parts being offered to him, Diesel decided to make his own film, the short "Multifacial," which received critical acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival in 1995. When Steven Spielberg saw the film, he reportedly wrote a part in his film, "Saving Private Ryan," for the actor, also letting him shoot the second unit scenes in the film. Spielberg's "stamp of approval" led Diesel to land a number of parts, including the voice of the title role in "The Iron Giant" and a small part in the low budget "Boiler Room."

"He got a very small part in a very big movie, and he made the most of it," Cohen tells Zap2it. **"In 'Boiler Room,' there's 40 guys in a room in Armani suits, but your eye goes to that bald guy. There's something about Vin that is why movie stars are called movie stars and why there's 20 of them and 10,000 of us making the films."**

"XXX" reunites Cohen and Diesel, who worked together on "The Fast and the Furious," the film that made

Diesel jump from actor to star.

"Last year Vin was the cool guy and in one year he's become the hot guy," says Cohen. **"When we did 'The Fast and the Furious,' Paul Walker was the sexy guy, and Vin was the masculine kind of guy. The pretty boy and the street guy. One year later, Vin Diesel is a sex symbol."**

For his part, Diesel says he doesn't see himself as a symbol, in fact he doesn't disagree with the New York Times' A.O. Scott who called him "the sexiest ugly man in the movies since Anthony Quinn" in a review for "Boiler Room."

"It's probably accurate," he laughs. **"I know I'm not pretty."**

But that doesn't stop girls from squealing during an advance preview the night before the interview every time he takes off his shirt in "XXX."

"The old axioms of 'women want to sleep with him and the men want to have him as a friend' --- well, last night...," laughs Cohen. **"He's an anti-hero. In our movie history, when you analyze it, the really cool leading men -- James Dean, Marlon Brando, Bobbie DeNiro, Al Pacino -- they're antiheroes, they're not the heroic guys; you can't say Pacino in 'The Godfather' is a hero. They're not Arnold and Sly and Ben and even Matt Damon in 'The Bourne Identity,' they're smoldering, angry outsiders with chips on their shoulders full of attitude -- and that, that is cool. That's who I'd like to be."**

The anti-hero title is something that Diesel agrees with, and even appears to look for in the parts that he plays. In both of his previous action films -- "Pitch Black" and "The Fast and the Furious" -- Diesel plays characters who are good guys, despite the fact that they all have committed illegal acts, including murder.

"I think the white-washed heroes are something of the '80s. Now the audience is demanding much more complex characters; the filmmaking going public is that much more film savvy and they need multi-layer characters," he says.

"My characters start as underdogs," he adds. **"They start off as flawed characters and allow the audience to become heroic with the character. I think it's a thing of the '50s that people just knew exactly how to be good people and nowadays it's less obvious."**

Diesel's ethnicity, he's part African-American and part Italian-American, also makes him a new type of action star who isn't easily identifiable.

"I like that I'm multicultural, I embrace my racial ambiguity," he says. **"I love to empower people. I love sending the message you can create your dream, you can do whatever you want to do."**

These elements also carry over to "XXX," in which Diesel plays an extreme sports enthusiast who doesn't mind breaking the rules who gets recruited by the government for an important spy mission. While the role seems like a perfect fit for Diesel, he was initially reluctant to take the role.

"I wouldn't have done the picture if Cohen didn't bring it to me," he says. **"The number one thing attractive thing about the film was the fact that Rob was directing it and I could work with him again. That was the carrot."**

"Vinnie was looking for the Academy Award-winning script right on the page. And I told him, 'You don't find great scripts, you make scripts great,'" Cohen recalls.

"I think that the first script was a little goofy. Good, but a little too comedic. One of the ways in which Rob enrolled me was by talking about the character's objective," Diesel explains. **"We were having cranberry and club sodas at the Chateau Marmont and he said, 'Xander Cage is a nihilist. Xander Cage is least likely to save the world, Xander Cage doesn't give a shit about the world. He's recruited by the CIA to save the world and learns patriotism and learns the value of life.'"**

"The zeitgeist of the antihero and the zeitgeist of youth is an antiauthoritarian more than anti-government," adds Cohen. **"His real struggle isn't against the government, it's that anyone who tells him what not to do is the enemy."**

Another feature that attracted him to "XXX" was the possibility of doing created a franchise project. Diesel, Cohen and the film's writer, Rich Wilkes, are already signed on for a sequel to the film, and Diesel sees more than one sequel in the future.

"When I made 'XXX,' I went into thinking that I'm going to do the best that I can to make this a franchise film, to make this a character that lasts," he says.

"It will eventually be more than one," he adds, **"but I'm just doing one film at a time."**

In the meantime, he's still trying to figure out which project to take on next.

"It's so damn tricky because I want to do it all. I want to do it all and I realize I can't and that's what's weird," he says. **"I wish I had more time."**

Diesel will next appear in the drama "Knockaround Guys," opposite Dennis Hopper, John Malkovich and Barry Pepper, which is slated to open this October. Plus, he's hoping to direct again, hopefully a feature-length version of "Multifacial." But one project that he's particularly excited about is "Hannibal," which he will both star in and produce.

"I have to do 'The Chronicles of Riddick' first," Diesel says, **"but I've never been more excited about a film."**

Not to be confused with the film by Ridley Scott, "Hannibal" tells the story of the Carthaginian general Hannibal the Conqueror, whose forces conquered Spain and then attacked Rome by the North. Hannibal Braca ultimately failed to conquer Rome and was later forced out of several European countries, and eventually committing suicide.

One thing that he's definitely trying to do is take more of a behind-the-scenes role in the films that he stars in.

"It lets everybody know how vested I am in the picture," he explains. **"I clarifies my commitment, do you know what I mean? If I say that I'm producing 'Hannibal,' then you know I really give a shit about the movie."**

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Vin at All Costs

The enigmatic Vin Diesel, poised to become a new-style Schwarzenegger in "XXX", says he was destined to become a superstar. Read how he broke through, in an excerpt from [Entertainment Weekly's](#) Aug. 2, 2002, cover story by Benjamin Svetkey

There are things Vin Diesel doesn't want you to know about Vin Diesel. His real name, for one (that would be Mark Vincent). His ethnic background, for another (half African-American, half Italian-American, or so we hear). If it were up to him, you probably wouldn't be reading his age right now (35). Even his hair is shrouded in mystery: He keeps his head shaved so smooth that not even his stylist knows for sure how much Diesel actually has.

But there is one thing about Vin Diesel that Vin Diesel has never been shy about sharing -- even when nobody is listening. **"I've always been certain that I was going to be a movie star,"** he says, his voice such a deep, low rumble it's a wonder it doesn't set off car alarms. **"Even as a kid I knew it. People keep asking if I've changed since becoming a celebrity. But I haven't changed because I've always thought I was a celebrity. It was the rest of the world that hadn't figured it out."**

The world, it seems, is about to get a crash course. The first full-scale Diesel-powered vehicle -- a \$90 million contraption called "XXX" -- opens Aug. 9, loaded with all the extras: booming pyrotechnics, wall-to-wall gunplay, and even a noisy opening sequence featuring the German industrial-metal group Rammstein. It will, if nothing else, be the loudest movie of the summer.

As Xander Cage, a grungy extreme athlete turned secret agent, Diesel dodges bullets while surfing down a banister on a waiter's tray. He outruns helicopters while doing handstands on a motorcycle. He stubbornly ignores orders from his scar-faced boss (Samuel L. Jackson), exchanges sneers with the stylishly sinister mastermind (New Zealand actor Marton Csokas) of a terrorist ring called Anarchy 99, and uses that throaty growl of his to sweet-talk an icy Russian beauty (Italian actress Asia Argento).

In other words, it's a "total reinvention of the spy film for a new generation," according to director Rob Cohen, who last teamed with Diesel for his total reinvention of the hot-rod movie, 2001's "The Fast and the Furious."

"James Bond is cool, but he's left over from that Clark Gable mentality," Diesel says. **"I mean, James Bond wears a suit. I don't know a kid today who wears a suit. So we've come up with a different kind of hero. A nihilist. An antihero. A guy who doesn't give a s--- about anything but his own thrills."**

For a guy who's made the pursuit of stardom his life's goal, who has always been so certain of his impending celebrity, Diesel seems to spend an awful lot of effort working on his own enigma. It could be a case of being careful what you wish for; now that he's actually felt the full privacy-crushing force of fame, he might be having second thoughts. He sometimes sounds that way. **"After you become famous, everything you do is suspect,"** he complains, although not very convincingly.

But here's another, far more plausible explanation: Diesel isn't being coy, he's being clever. He's not hiding from the public, he's courting it. By stripping away all identifying marks, presenting himself as a blank slate --

particularly when it comes to his racial background -- he's found a way to market himself to the broadest possible audience. He's selling himself as a multiethnic Everyman, a movie star virtually every demographic can claim as its own. **"People seem to make him into whatever they want him to be,"** says "Boiler Room" director Ben Younger. **"Which is maybe one of the reasons why he's so popular. He's our boy."**

Ironically, it was precisely this ethnic fuzziness that Diesel once thought was his greatest hurdle. Back in 1994, he even directed a movie about it, "Multi-Facial," a 20-minute short in which he (type)cast himself as a racially unidentifiable actor who pretends to be a different ethnicity on every audition -- and still can't land a part.

At the time he made it, "Multi-Facial" was meant as an out-of-work actor's lament, but it turned out to have a happy ending. Several, in fact. The film screened at Cannes and found fans in Younger (who cast the actor in "Boiler Room" without having met him). Oh, and "Multi-Facial" caught the eye of one other director, Steven Spielberg, who was impressed enough to tap Diesel for his next film, "Saving Private Ryan," as the doomed Italian-American grunt Caparzo.

After "Saving Private Ryan" Diesel moved into a dinky Hollywood apartment, continuing his campaign to become a movie star. As always, though, his methods were unconventional. One day his "Ryan" costar Edward Burns popped in and found Diesel scribbling on pads of paper. Diesel, it turned out, was compiling lists of all the young actors who were doing better than he was and jotting notes on precisely when he planned on surpassing each of them.

"Vin has always been like that," Burns says. **"He's always had a very clear idea of where he was going and when he would get there. He's always talked as if he knew it was going to happen -- it was just a matter of when."**

This sort of high-octane confidence (or unleaded arrogance, call it what you like) hasn't exactly made Diesel a universally beloved figure in Hollywood. His supposed demand for a \$30 million payday to do the "Fast and the Furious" sequel, for instance, had eyeballs rolling all over town. Ultimately it was decided that the sequel would shoot without Diesel; it'll be directed by John Singleton instead of Cohen (who would direct only with Diesel behind the wheel). Diesel denies that money had anything to do with the deal falling through. "I was being offered three franchises at the same time -- 'Pitch Black,' 'XXX,' and 'The Fast and the Furious' -- and I had to choose," he says.

The irony here, of course, is that Diesel is seen as a franchise-worthy star today not because of any hits he's already made, but because of anticipated hits he has yet to make. Anticipated hits like "Riddick," the "Pitch Black" sequel, and the already announced follow-up to "XXX," for which Diesel will earn his first \$20 million payday.

"What's going on," explains one Hollywood agent whose company once pursued Diesel as a client, **"is that there's a shortage of action stars in Hollywood right now. Schwarzenegger, Stallone, Willis -- they're too old. So a vacuum has developed. And Diesel has fallen in."** "Fast and the Furious" writer Gary Scott Thompson agrees: **"He fills a huge void right now. There are no action stars left. Diesel is it. Every action writer in Hollywood is writing their scripts for him."**

Diesel, naturally, has no doubts about being an action hero. Attached to his trailer wall may be a clue to just how big his dreams may eventually get. **"Look at this poster,"** he says, beaming at the glowering, muscular movie star on the new "XXX" one-sheet. **"This isn't a poster. This is a declaration of war!"**

THE 'XXX' FACTOR

Sun Aug 4,
By COREY LEVITAN
pagesix.com

Here's the story on actor Vin Diesel, the onetime New York bouncer turned Hollywood action star:

Apparently, his real name is Mark Vincent. He's 35, grew up in the West Village and is half African-American, half Italian.

He's said to have three siblings, including a fraternal twin, Paul Vincent, who works as a film editor. They were raised by their mother, an astrologer and psychologist, and their stepfather, a drama teacher.

A career in acting happened by accident for the delinquent Diesel, some reports say. At age 7, he and his friends broke into the Theater for the New City on First Avenue with the intention of vandalizing it.

They supposedly got caught by a female theater employer, who, instead of turning them in, offered them \$20 a week to study there.

Diesel cleaned up his act and went on to major in English for three years at Hunter College, before dropping out to move to L.A. He now lives in the Hollywood Hills with his dog Roman, a 170-pound Italian mastiff.

All true?

"The irony is how much of that is inaccurate," said Diesel on a recent afternoon at a Beverly Hills hotel. He wore a V-neck T-shirt large enough for his tree-trunk biceps, a skull ring and a silver bracelet with an elephant design.

"There have been so many ideas and assumptions thrown around that it's almost amusing."

"I'm selective about how much of my identity I unravel, because I don't know how much it helps my acting," said the star of "XXX," an action/spy thriller co-starring Samuel L. Jackson that opens Friday, and the upcoming historical action pic "Hannibal," currently being polished off by "Gladiator" screenwriter David Franzoni.

"If anything, I think it hurts performances if you know too much about me," Diesel said. **"It would be like Bill Clinton trying to play a role in a Steven Spielberg movie."**

Simple facts can be gleaned first-hand. Diesel works out a lot. His hair would be thinning on top if he didn't shave it all of. And he smokes American Spirits - a lot of them.

"You caught me," he said. **"Smoking is the one thing I hate about myself."**

In more than name, Diesel resembles his "XXX" character, Xander Cage, an extreme athlete recruited to be an NSA spy (with the code name Triple-X) who's capable of executing superhuman stunts to get out of predicaments - such as snowboarding one step ahead of an avalanche.

Diesel is skilled at dodging personal questions. In such situations, the actor politely runs through a catalogue of well-rehearsed expressions.

One seems to mean, **"That's nice, you did your research, but I'm still not answering."**

Another indicates, **"Come on, even if I did answer personal questions, I wouldn't answer that."**

Still another - the one an interviewer really doesn't want to see - signifies, **"Now you've gone too far."**

It is said that Diesel guards the secret of his race especially closely, and different groups do claim him as their own. In fact, his first film, "Multi-Facial" - which he wrote, directed and starred in to the tune of \$3,000 eight years ago - was a 20-minute short about an actor trying keep his race ambiguous, adopting a different ethnicity at every audition, and never landing a single part.

The film so impressed Steven Spielberg that the director created a doomed Italian soldier for Diesel to play in 1998's "Saving Private Ryan." That paved the way for roles in the critically respected "Boiler Room," and the auto-theft thriller "The Fast and the Furious," which grossed \$145 million.

"I thought that movie would do well, but I didn't know it would do this well," Diesel said.

According to the cover story of the August GQ, Diesel's stock rose so high last year that while on vacation he instructed his agent not to call unless it was to say that Columbia Pictures had agreed to his demand of \$10 million to star in "XXX."

"Yeah, f--k it, that's true," he said, laughing.

Since then, Diesel has reportedly joined the coveted \$20 million club for a "XXX" sequel, to be directed by Rob Cohen, who did "Furious."

That decision, however, meant declining a role in the "Furious" sequel, helmed by a different director.

"It was tough to turn down, but you can't do too many franchises," Diesel said.

His next film, "Hannibal," casts Diesel as a third-century B.C. Carthaginian general who famously rode an elephant. The actor has also signed onto "The Chronicles of Riddick," in which he'll reprise the sci-fi role he created in 2000's "Pitch Black."

And he'd like to use his newfound clout to produce a script he wrote, "Doorman," based on his days in the New York bar scene.

Fifteen years ago, Diesel worked as a bouncer at the Tunnel, and later at Mars. He guarded the doors of those Manhattan hot spots with the same balance of charm and intimidation that has filmgoers lining up to see him in action.

"I think I was an idealistic bouncer," said Diesel. **"I was the most diplomatic. If it was two of us and 10 of them, I could try and calm people down."**

He's still comfortable at clubs and bars, though these days he hangs with owners such as his friend Nick Karas, who has a piece of Le Bar in Paris, according to a source who's spent time with him in France.

In fact, the City of Light has become a kind of home away from home for Diesel, who is said to be a talented dancer and frequent companion of fashion models. One source claimed that the actor's been apartment hunting in Paris in recent weeks.

In the interview, however, Diesel deftly dodged a wide range of questions. For instance, is he currently dating a Czech model named Pavla Hrbkova?

"What else can I tell you about the movie?" he offered.

Then, finally, there was one last, tiny crack in his armor.

"I used the name Mark Vincent for a while," he said. **"I'll give you that. I wouldn't say that normally, but the hometown can have that one."**

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INTERVIEW: Vin Diesel of "XXX"

Cinema Confidential
POSTED ON 08/04/02

By Sean Chavel in Los Angeles

Before Vin Diesel became a hot commodity in Hollywood, he was working as a nightclub bouncer and as a telemarketer. Few people know that he has been a filmmaker, too, and saved his money from odd jobs in the early 90's to work on his own projects. One film by Diesel, Multifacial, was screened at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival. It wasn't until Steven Spielberg discovered him and cast him as one of the infantry men in "Saving Private Ryan" that Diesel became a recognizable face. Diesel's first leading roles in "Pitch Black" and "The Fast and the Furious" became surprise box office hits. Currently, Diesel runs his own production company One Race Productions where he is developing a trilogy based on the Pitch Black movie called "The Chronicles of Riddick."

How do you feel about all this action star business?

You know what? I'm going to do what I'm going to do. I'm going to approach every role with the same conviction. If the roles that I play are in an action movie, then that's cool.

How much is riding on this summer for you now that you're the new Hollywood hot guy?

I see this summer's itinerary as pre-production on [The Chronicles of Riddick]. That's the reality. That's what so funny. I'm not at home going, 'Yeah! I've made it!' I'm trying to make sure that The Chronicles of Riddick is amazing. That's where my head's at.

So you don't get a minute to enjoy this success, do you?

Maybe... I don't know. Who knows? I'm just a regular guy. I come from a family of hard workers. We just think about the work and that's the most important thing.

Are you uneasy about letting stardom intrude into your life?

I think what I do is just – to stay as proactive as possible. I'd like to turn The Chronicles of Riddick into a trilogy. Pitch Black is to be a prequel just in the same way that Hobbitt was a sequel to the Lord of the Rings trilogy.

What's the formula to a successful movie franchise?

It's important to incorporate as much mythology as possible. Star Wars was so memorable in the 70's, it was a mythology. I'm interested in creating some kind of epic mythology like that with [Chronicles].

Did you always know that your destiny was to be an actor?

Yes. As far back as I could remember. (Pause) I used to read these actors' biographies. Every actor would say, 'I always knew that I was going to do this.' Or a testimony like, 'Yeah, young Marlon Brando always walked around the house and entertained the family.' I'm telling you if there's anything that you believe about me, know that I always thought and believed that someday I would get to a place where my movies would get made.

Why did you want it so bad?

God, that's a real long, long, long answer. When I was young, my father didn't get those thirty-five dollar baseball tickets. We didn't go to basketball or football games. We grew up in the city. The only thing that was accessible was movies. My father was in the theater. We'd go to movies and spend an hour or two afterwards talking about them. That was kind of my bonding [opportunity] with my father. I started appreciate film. When I was really, really young I saw my father come home in character costume... I guess I was a kid that was really searching for identity. There's something therapeutic about becoming a character.

What we're the worse times when you were struggling to be an actor?

I was always broke. I always hustled. There was a point in my life that I wouldn't buy clothes. Or at least I wouldn't buy clothes unless I could return them. Before I started making my own movies, I would be telemarketing fourteen to eighteen hours a day just to make money to make my own movies. I would work the whole year, save up all my money and invest that into a movie. I was always adamant about spending my time accordingly. Something I learned in my mid-twenties is the most valuable thing I have in my life is my hours and how I spend them.

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Word's out: Vin's in

By BRUCE KIRKLAND

[Toronto Sun](#)

HOLLYWOOD -- The young women in the cinema start tittering as soon as Vin Diesel begins to pull off his shirt, revealing his very real rippling muscles and a body canvas of fake tattoos that are signature notes for his role in XXX.

By the time he has crawled seductively on top of a slinky woman dressed only in her Victoria's Secret ensemble, Diesel's femme fans are howling with carnal delight, their reaction roaring through the darkened place like a sexual tsunami.

This pure, white-hot, animalistic reaction confirms one amazing thing: Vin Diesel is Hollywood's newest superstar, both for his bad-boy sexual appeal and as an action hero. Columbia Pictures is ratcheting up XXX to be one of the biggest hits of the second half of the summer.

Designed as a head-banging, punk rock, anti-James Bond spy-thriller franchise, XXX opens across North American on Friday. Insiders think it stands a chance to rival Austin Powers In Goldmember for second place in the summer box-office sweeps, behind only the mega-hit Spider-Man. Diesel plays a rebellious extreme sport enthusiast who is forcefully recruited by the U.S. government to become an undercover agent who must, of course, save the world. He is signed for a sequel.

For Diesel, the promise that XXX brings is literally a passionate dream come true. He has been gunning for movie stardom most of his life. It is also the end of his anonymity.

"I just took a vacation," Diesel tells The Sun in a one-on-one interview that follows a day of round-table group sessions. **"I just did a backpacking tour -- with room service -- all over in Europe. You'll have to excuse me. I'm coming back to 'reality.' I'm hearing all this stuff about a blitz, all this marketing, and the expectations for the film."**

He is a man on the edge of his own volcano. Diesel took the vacation with friends as his self-imposed lull before the storm.

"It was important for me because it's that anonymity thing. (I wanted) to savour that last moment. It was nice to do that little grounding-reality thing and take my friends from New York, the same guys who bounced with me, and just go to Europe and just be kind of nobodies. It was fun."

Freshly turned 35 on July 18, New York-born Diesel is a nobody no more. He is on fire, so much so that the current GQ magazine features Diesel on the cover (one of several magazines that do). In the case of GQ, he is surrounded by flames.

Diesel asks if the fire is stoked too high in the photo (one of Diesel's most disarming traits is to ask interviewers for advice). I suggest the image represents the heat surrounding his ascent to stardom. Diesel flashes a grin and says:

"It's a good analogy. It's crazy! But I just want to make magic. Because all this stuff is unexplainable. All this stuff that is happening to me, all this great and wonderful fortune ..." He pauses and, for a moment, he seems overwhelmed.

"I could say until I was blue in the face that I knew it was going to happen. But how would I really know it was going to happen? I wanted it to happen. I believed it. I used to tell people, 'As sure as I'm breathing I'm going to be a movie star!' (But) it's still crazy. It's still weird."

When I suggest that this never could have happened when he was 25 -- that he had not developed the on-screen sex appeal he has today and was not ready as an action hero -- Diesel agrees.

"I think it's all accurate. I think it's dead on. But it wasn't a lack of effort. I started when I was young and (thought) that I should have had it 10 years ago. And I didn't have it. I was frustrated. When you can't pay the rent, you get frustrated. When you can't make ends meet, you get a little frustrated."

He did not make his feature film debut until 1998, when Steven Spielberg cast him as the doomed private Adrian Caparzo in his war epic Saving Private Ryan. Before that, Diesel spent his time working as a bouncer, auditioning, appearing on stage and working for a telemarketer to pay to write and direct his own shorts, Multi-Facial (1994) and Strays (1997).

Spielberg eventually saw Multi-Facial. It led to the Caparzo role. Which led to voice work as the title character in the under-rated animated adventure The Iron Giant. Diesel went on to co-star as a broker in a suit in Boiler Room, as a sci-fi space criminal turned hero in Pitch Black, and most significantly as the car-crazy anti-hero in The Fast And The Furious. That was last summer's surprise hit and set the stage for XXX.

Veteran Rob Cohen directed both The Fast And The Furious and XXX (or Triple-X, as Diesel calls it). He is enthusiastic about talking up Diesel. **"Let's start with Vin as just a man, just a talent. Vin has a unique cluster of characteristics that I began to recognize more and more as I did The Fast And The Furious. I'll remind people: He was cast as the second lead."**

That was behind Paul Walker, who recently told The Sun he thinks Dwayne (The Rock) Johnson is Diesel's only real rival for future supremacy in the action genre, now that the likes of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, Harrison Ford, Bruce Willis and others are either gearing down or have faded away. "Vin is The Man!"

Cohen continues his analysis of Diesel: **"He had an odd vulnerability and a soulfulness that, on the surface and in Pitch Black, you didn't quite see. He has the power and physicality, but what I didn't know, when I cast him in The Fast And The Furious, (was) how deep he could take things and how a kind of charm emerges. In the past, action men have basically been killing machines who can make a joke."**

"Vinny, on the other hand, has the courage to be overwhelmed and uncertain and sometimes to be almost nakedly needy. He has that unique polarity and no one else has it."

Actually, Diesel does have his antecedents. Cohen could have been describing John Barrymore -- Drew's famous grandfather -- in his legendary role as the rapsallion French poet-swashbuckler in the 1927 silent film The Beloved Rogue. Diesel does with words what Barrymore did with sly looks. Everything old is new again. But Diesel is unique today.

Except for one thing. He is one of two new multi-racial, multi-cultural action stars. **"It has taken America a long time to acknowledge the new face of America,"** Cohen says, **"and, to some degree, Vinny is that new face." The Rock, with his Samoan and Afro-Canadian heritage, is his only match.**

"It's dope!" Diesel says of the multi-cultural angle. **"It's amazing. It's a huge social thing! We'll see how it unravels."**

But exactly what Diesel's heritage might be, of course, is a mystery. And Diesel has no intention of solving that mystery, although there are stories he is Afro-American and Italian. Cohen says he has heard rumours of a Cuban background, although he has never asked for information from the source.

Diesel refuses to discuss his family background himself, although there are printed sources that claim his real name is Mark Vincent, that his stepfather is a New York theatre teacher, that he has no interest in his real father, that his mother is an astrologist-psychiatrist, and that his non-identical, fair-skinned, blue-eyed twin brother, Paul Vincent, is an aspiring film editor who received a credit on Diesel's Multi-Facial.

"I want to keep my mystery," Diesel tells The Sun. **"The thing is -- and this is important -- it's not that I'm hiding anything. It's not that I don't want people to know anything. It's just that I would rather spend more time talking about more productive things that relate to the film."**

"Harrison Ford said the same thing, you know -- the reason he wants to keep his private life private is that, when he becomes a character, you're not thinking about who he's dating. It's so hard, if you become too much of a celebrity, to be an actor who can blend into different roles. So I want to keep that as much as possible."

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The manly brew of an action star

Actor Vin Diesel likes playing a flawed hero with a purpose

By David Elliott
SPECIAL TO [MSNBC.COM](#)

LOS ANGELES, Aug. 5 — Vin Diesel will not be offered the shy, witty, dithering Hugh Grant roles. In “About a Boy,” Diesel would have simply shaved the kid’s head, tattooed “bollocks” on him and sent him into the street with an Uzi. But with “XXX” opening Friday, Diesel, 35, seems rather quietly restrained about becoming a “franchised” movie star. The movie, says director Rob Cohen, “won’t make Vin a star. He already is one.”

DIESEL IS a manly brew, and not what the French call vin ordinaire. He doesn’t pump it at a posh hotel. He is pensive, his voice low-key without the full octane of a rumbling engine. His squinty ball of a face relaxes into a rather demure smile.

“I may be losing my voice,” Diesel admits, panting to ride the publicity storm that has made him a summer cover throb, much as his thrill-seeker turned anti-terror agent, Xander Cage, outpaces a huge avalanche in “XXX.”

The former club bouncer and phone pitchman from New York (born Mark Vincent) rose from minor roles, plus voicing “The Iron Giant,” then charged from the street-race pack of “The Fast and Furious.” He got \$2 million for that piston party and \$10 million for “XXX,” the \$84 million, post-Bond action spree directed by fellow shave-head Cohen; a sequel should double his salary if “XXX” rivals the \$42 million that Cohen’s “F and F” did in its opening weekend.

DISCOVERING A PURPOSE

“XXX,” made mostly in Europe, pairing Diesel with generic villains but a really expressive co-star, Asia Argento, was hustled together in one year with Cohen and writer Rich Wilkes doing 37 drafts, as effects teams began their showoff scenes. Diesel did not commit fast:
Advertisement

“I don’t want to dog the script, but it was a little too goofy, too comedic ... a little like Austin Powers. The way Rob enrolled me was by telling me, as we had cranberries and club sodas at the Chateau Marmont: ‘Xander Cage is a nihilist, doesn’t give a (bleep). He sure doesn’t care about saving the world. So he is recruited by the CIA to save the world, and learns about patriotism and commitment.

“That was circa 9/11, so you can imagine the impact that had then, when we all had this universal feeling of wanting to do more. So Cage becomes a hero, but he isn’t Bond, he’s a thrill guy who learns that something else — life — matters.

“I think in the ’80s, the heroes were whitewashed. Now people want flawed heroes, we don’t care if he is perfect. Like in ‘Pitch Black,’ the guy was introduced as a common killer, then you saw, as he found, the flawed heroism in him. And Cage is no saint, but his action finds a purpose.”

ROLES SHAPED FOR HIM

Ready to appear ripped for PR — the “XXX” poster is his muscled arm gleaming with tattoos — Diesel avows, **“I don’t think about” the hunk image.**

“I’m too busy. All that is afterglow.” He softly chuckles and adds, **“You know, that arm is so obnoxiously tattooed, naked but not naked, real and not real. This story is almost like Cage’s dream fantasy.”**

As for being typed: **“I don’t worry about it. After this film I have a small ensemble film coming out, with Dennis Hopper and John Malkovich, [titled] ‘Knockaround Guys.’ What I am doing is a product of what I’m offered. But since I have produced and directed films, I know how to steer the process.”**

Can he make a big movie happen?

“I hope so, would like to think so. That seems to be the temperature now. It’s not like I am beating

people out of roles. They're being shaped for me." He picks up an issue of Variety and preens an item about his coming film on an ancient hero: **"I have never been so excited about a film as I am about 'Hannibal,' next year."**

He will not be in a "Fast and Furious" sequel because, he says, **"I just didn't feel it was franchisable. We did that story. With 'XXX,' I wanted to do everything I could to make a hero who can last for several films."**

LEARNING THE STUNTS

The big physique, too, got some rehab: **"Cage was going to have a Navy SEALs father, so I did some SEALs training in San Diego. Basically, I did the extreme-sports version of weightlifting, and had to learn all the stunt apparatus stuff."**

"I don't know how the hell they did the avalanche, but that is me snowboarding downhill."

Diesel began with kid acting, dropped out of college. His mom gave pre-Vin a book on making movies "at used-car prices." He made short films seen at festivals, including one that spurred Steven Spielberg to cast him in "Saving Private Ryan," but his chief inspirations were **"early Scorsese movies like 'Mean Streets,' also 'El Mariachi,' which was made for \$7,000,"** he says. **"So I sold tools on the phone to get that money for my films."**

He wants to direct again but, he says, **"I find there is less and less time! You stack the productions up, each is nine months or a year. This just isn't movies for used-car prices."**

Who better knows than a man named Diesel?

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The Next Action Hero

It's not just Vin Diesel's brawn but his multiethnic background that gives the XXX star mass appeal

[Time.com](#)

Friday, Aug. 02, 2002

For the past decade, hollywood has been desperately trying to pump some testosterone into the lucrative but enervated action genre. With Stallone and Schwarzenegger approaching 60, the studios have actually taught skinny guys like Keanu Reeves and Tobey Maguire how to fight. They've even taken the drastic measure of coming up with some really interesting action ideas, like The Matrix.

But Hollywood sees an unlikely savior on the horizon: Vin Diesel. Tough, stoic and tawny, with muscles like Adonis and a voice so deep only Bea Arthur can imitate it, Diesel became a star last summer in the surprise street-racing hit The Fast and the Furious. At the moment in Hollywood, Diesel is the very model of the new action hero.

Although their parents may not have heard of him, members of the hip-hop generation have embraced Diesel so enthusiastically that his per-picture fee is rapidly rising into the \$20 million territory. Teens are so excited about seeing him in XXX, a spy movie opening Aug. 9, you have to wonder if they think the title refers to something besides extreme sports. Like The Rock, whose Scorpion King grossed more than \$90 million earlier this year, Diesel is also part of a nascent constellation of stars whose melting-pot backgrounds and features seem to be resonating deeply with young moviegoers of all colors. Hollywood has seen the future of the action hero, and it's multiethnic.

With his exotic looks — olive skin and full lips — he's widely assumed to be of Italian and African heritage, but Diesel resolutely refrains from identifying his ethnicity. One Race is the name of his production company, and he refers to himself simply as "multicultural." **"I support the idea of being multicultural primarily for all the invisible kids, the ones who don't fit into one ethnic category and then find themselves lost in some limbo,"** says Diesel, 35, as he dips into a bowl of hummus on the patio of Los Angeles' gothic Chateau Marmont hotel.

In XXX — a high-camp, high-concept, highly stylized adrenaline rush of a movie — Diesel stars as Xander Cage, the ripped and tattooed un-James Bond. Like Diesel himself, who admits that when he was a child his **"appetite for attention was insatiable,"** Xander is a self-starting, self-promoting charmer who is presumably unfit for any occupation other than star. Obsessed with dangerous exploits that require extreme athleticism, Xander sells black-market films of himself performing such stunts as stealing the Corvette of a right-wing Senator, driving it off a cliff and parachuting to safety. He's recruited by a U.S. security official (a

scar-faced Samuel L. Jackson) to save the world from an East European anarchist.

In preview screenings, men cheer the stunts (see Vin outpace an avalanche on a snowboard!) while young women whoop and holler every time Diesel reveals his tattooed chest — which is frequently. The film explicitly sets up Diesel as the new postmodern Bond by killing off a nameless spy wearing a tux in the first scene. A sequel is already in the works.

"In the past, John Wayne and Jimmy Stewart were the face of America," says Santiago Pozo, CEO of Arenas Entertainment, which caters to the Latin market in the U.S. **"Today it's The Rock or Vin Diesel."** The irony is this: the guy formerly known as Mark Vincent spent most of his life feeling like an ethnic misfit, even on his home turf in Manhattan's Greenwich Village. Diesel, who has a twin brother with blond hair and blue eyes, discovered the theater through his stepdad, an acting coach whom he still idolizes. (Diesel never knew his biological father.) Starting at age 5, he felt most at home onstage. **"I found that there was something refreshing about having my identity be crystal clear [playing] a role,"** he says. Acting jobs were hard to come by, so the 6-ft. 1-in. Diesel, who had been pumping iron since he was a teenager, became a star bouncer at Manhattan clubs in the 1980s. **"The name Vin Diesel came out of the bouncing thing,"** he says. **"We all had nicknames. It was a wonderful thing to detach a little bit."**

In the early 1990s, he began writing, directing and starring in his own tiny-budget films. Multi-facial, his 20-min. short about an actor constantly slipping into the cracks between black and white roles, played at Cannes in 1995. Steven Spielberg saw the movie and gave Diesel his first break as the ill-fated Private Adrian Caparzo in 1998's *Saving Private Ryan*. But Diesel was still trying to find his place in Hollywood. Already familiar with the transvestites of Manhattan's club world, he lobbied for the part of a smart-mouthed drag queen in the 1999 drama *Flawless*, opposite Robert De Niro. Director Joel Schumacher turned Diesel down because of the actor's massive physique — a liability that he would eventually turn into an asset in the action genre. **"A transvestite spends her life trying to look as feminine as possible, and I have lived a different way,"** says Diesel. **"I have obviously spent my life celebrating my masculinity."**

As a crooked Wall Street hustler in *Boiler Room* and a sci-fi psychopath in *Pitch Black* (both released in 2000), he proved that there was some acting talent underneath all that muscle. The roles also established a template for his onscreen persona — the bigger-than-life tough guy with a soft center. Unlike Schwarzenegger and Stallone, Diesel comes with a disarming streak of vulnerability. **"He's not invincible, and not so handsome as to be off-putting,"** says Rob Cohen, director of *The Fast and the Furious* and *XXX*. **"We live in times of tremendous unrest and insecurity, so a guy who says, 'Look, I'm insecure but ultimately I'm going to do the right thing' is both realistic and aspirational."**

Offscreen, Diesel is a born diva: magnetic, magnanimous, tempestuous. His entourage often includes outsize pals from his bouncer days. The fantasy of being a superstar is a kind of pornography to him, at once titillating and disturbing. **"Every year I go on a little trip,"** he says. **"I call it a month of anonymity. I'll go to Europe; I'll go to some happening city. After the city is onto the fact that I'm there, I'll leave and go to some obscure place, and just walk the streets and not worry about anything."**

When a group of women descends on a table next to Diesel's on the Chateau Marmont patio, he instinctively puts on his sunglasses. The Irish heartthrob Colin Farrell (*Minority Report*), who happens to be visiting the hotel, wanders by with a bottle of Corona to say hello. **"What are you doing next?"** asks Farrell. Diesel explains that he's about to start shooting *The Chronicles of Riddick*, a sequel to *Pitch Black*, and he's developing a Braveheart-type historical epic in which he will star as Hannibal, the Carthaginian conqueror. **"So you're taking over the world,"** says Farrell, a bit awed by Diesel's clear-eyed ambition. **"That's good, if that's what you want."**

Diesel, in fact, does want.

"Yeah," he says, leaning forward, **"it is nice."**

E! Online Q+A with Vin Diesel

The new action hero on big flicks, bigger bucks and beating James Bond at his own game

[E! Online](#)

by Glenn Whipp | August 6, 2002

If you missed *The Fast and the Furious* last year, you're probably wondering: Who is Vin Diesel, and why are studios paying him \$20 million to make movies?

The 35-year-old New Yorker was best known for his supporting role in *Saving Private Ryan*, before an antihero car thief in *The Fast and the Furious* vaulted Diesel into superstar status.

Now, Hollywood believes it has finally found the successor to Schwarzenegger and Stallone. And Diesel is

ready to prove his action-hero mettle with his new movie, XXX, playing grungy extreme athlete Xander Cage, recruited to save the world.

We talked up the man about his sudden rise, why he bailed on a Fast and Furious sequel, how bouncing helped (and hurt) his acting career and his surprising choice for a favorite movie.

Does it feel like all this attention has come out of nowhere?

Yes and no. It's something I've been working for and planning on for a number of years. Every movie I've taken, every role I've done has been a means to get to this point. It's not an accident. So, while to some people it may seem pretty sudden, in a way I've been working toward this all my life.

Xander Cage is being marketed as a James Bond for the next generation. Do you think Bond was in dire need of an update?

Definitely. To take nothing away from the Bond movies--I loved them--the Bond character is about as relevant to young audiences as someone like Clark Gable. I mean, Bond wears a suit. No kid today wears a suit.

Xander Cage doesn't have a lot of hangups--he's not going to a therapist. He's a doer of deeds and makes no bones about being the new breed of superagent. In that respect, I think he is the voice of the younger generation. God help us. [Laughs.]

Are you a doer of deeds when it comes to all the stunts taking place in the movie--snowboarding, motocross, rock climbing and all that?

I was more involved with the stunts than the studio would have liked. And it was an issue on several occasions. Every time I went out on my motocross bike, our line producer, Arne Schmidt, would be out following me. But the only time I got hurt was on a snowboard jump in Austria. I got too much air, nosedived and--whack!--landed on my back. Thank God the snow was soft.

Were you into extreme sports before the movie?

Not specifically. But in New York, we did our own version of these stupid things, like riding down Madison Avenue on rollerblades, holding the back of a bus or a cab fender going 50 mph.

So, making XXX was another outlet for that kind of energy?

Yeah, and that's good. I can't be as extroverted or crazy and silly and free as I used to be, just being a kid in New York City.

Are you okay with that?

I don't know if I'm okay with that or if I haven't really faced that new reality because I've been so immersed in everything. But it's bizarre.

You had the summer off. How did you spend your vacation?

I backpacked through Europe with room service. I did the actual walking, then I spent the night in some pretty cool places. It's kind of a ritual for me. It's a month of anonymity, walking around the streets, no one knowing who I am. I can ask directions from anyone and they don't have a clue. I needed it then, and I need it now. But at the same time, I was saying goodbye to it.

You don't think you can be anonymous after XXX?

Maybe in Romania. It's a little bittersweet, but I'm not complaining. I'm just making movies to the best of my ability. The rest, I can't control.

Why did you decide to bail on the sequel to The Fast and the Furious?

I can only do so many franchise films. I'm committed to a sequel to Pitch Black...maybe a trilogy of sequels. And I knew going into XXX that I would want to revisit Xander Cage. I put a lot of energy into making that character and the film as good as they could be with that thought in mind. With The Fast and the Furious, I didn't go into it thinking I would make a second one. So, it was an easy choice.

Even with all the money Universal was offering?

Yeah, and no one knows how much it really was. It was a lot of money. You have to think about that. All that money for two months' work--in and out, a guaranteed franchise hit. But hey, it's only money.

And it's not like you're hurting these days. You got \$10 million for XXX, and your paydays for the Pitch Black sequel and proposed XXX sequel start at \$20 mil. Does that seem a little surreal to you?

The major bucks are interesting. It's hard to talk about the major bucks without sounding ungrateful. But when you're working and continually in the process of something, then you never get the opportunity to step out and think about it. The money is definitely secondary, a byproduct of whatever new lifestyle you have to have to survive as a celebrity. I'll probably need a more self-sufficient residence, because I won't be as apt to go out and be social.

Will that be a big adjustment?

That's a good question. I don't know. I've talked to people I know about handling fame, like Tom Hanks and

Steven Spielberg.

And what do they tell you?

Their advice isn't that good. [Laughs.] I think I'm doomed. I don't think there's anything you can do.

You're hesitant to talk about your specific background but your multiethnicity has become one of your selling points. Did you ever think that would come to pass?

There were times over the years that were pretty frustrating. I don't think I was ever cognizant of how I was going to turn it around. I made a short film, Multi-Facial where I played a guy who tries on a different ethnicity at every audition and still can't get a part. That was part of the process. I just kept pressing on, and I think people gravitated toward my work. Steven Spielberg saw Multi-Facial and decided to write a role for me in Saving Private Ryan.

And now you've got people of all races claiming you as one of their own.

Which I think is dope. The world has become this big melting pot, and I think people are ready for a hero who is more ambiguous. Yeah, being multicultural has gone from the Achilles' heel of my career to a strength.

Women certainly seem to have no problem with it. When I saw XXX, women in the audience just erupted every time you took off your shirt. How does it feel being a sex symbol?

That's not a bad thing, although it's a little weird. As a kid, I wasn't a pretty boy. I was never being chased by women.

When did you start to become comfortable around women?

Probably when I worked as a bouncer in New York. When you're bouncing, you're around women so much you lose your inhibitions about talking to them. Plus, the job makes you the hot ticket.

Did bouncing help your career in any other ways?

Well, when you're bouncing, you know how to speak in a way that's as amiable as possible, but there's something you can add to it that's always menacing.

Which is perfect for action roles, right?

Yeah, but then it can backfire, too. A couple of years when I was bouncing, I'd go into an audition and say, "Hi, my name is Vin Diesel. I'm here for this role." And it was like I had a nine-foot gorilla behind me saying, "And if you don't like me, I'm going to beat the shit out of you." Because I was saying, "Hi, my name is Vin Diesel" the same way I'd say as a bouncer, "No, you're not coming in here tonight."

And how does that voice work with women these days?

Quite well, thank you.

Anything remotely serious?

[Smiles.] I'm doing quite well.

Is there anything you haven't accomplished yet that you'd like to do?

I want to make a romantic comedy. I'm a huge fan of It Happened One Night, with Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert. I've watched it hundreds of times. [He launches into a three-minute scene from the movie, complete with perfect imitations of Gable and Colbert.] I don't see a lot of romantic-comedy scripts. It might have to do with the way I look. But I'll do one. Maybe I'll remake It Happened One Night. I've never waited for anyone to give me anything anyway. So, I'll just have to do it myself.

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We Have Diesel

seattle.citysearch.com

If you listen to Hollywood hype, Vin Diesel is the next Arnold Schwarzenegger, a new action hero for the new millennium. But behind that blockbuster physique lurks a true artiste. The former bouncer once sold tools over the phone to earn enough money to write and direct his first feature. He's also capable of different kinds of roles, with a part in the upcoming "Knockaround Guys," a smaller, ensemble-driven movie. Here's what the cerebral muscle man had to say when we talked to him recently.

Q. How did you get involved in "XXX"?

A. Actually, at first I didn't want to do it, because I thought the first draft of the script was too goofy, a little too comedic. So the way that [director] Rob Cohen enrolled me was conceptually. We were having cranberry-

and-club-sodas at Chateau Marmont, and he said, "Xander Cage is a nihilist. Xander Cage is the least likely to save the world. Xander Cage doesn't care about the world. Xander Cage is recruited by the CIA to save the world, and in the process he learns patriotism and the value of life." This was circa 9/11, so you can imagine the added impact that that kind of story had. And then it was just like every project--we hammer it through and make it all work.

Q. What kind of training did you have to do to prepare for the role of Xander Cage?

A. I basically just did the extreme-sports version of weightlifting for three months. I did motocross training and snowboard training and learned how to speed climb. Initially the character was going to have a father who was in the Navy SEALs, so I had to do some SEALs training down in San Diego, which ended up being valuable for the third act with the submarine.

Q. Do you feel any pressure about how high the expectations for "XXX" are?

A. No, because I feel confident about the movie. I had to make a decision whether I would lend myself to the "XXX" franchise or "The Fast and the Furious" franchise. I thought "The Fast and the Furious" was a great film, but I don't know if it was a "franchise-able" film. So I went into "XXX" thinking, I'm going to do the best that I can to make this a franchise film, to make this a character that lasts. I'm going to do everything I can to make this a true hero, a true answer to the spy movie genre.

Q. How do you feel about being a sex symbol?

A. I don't even think about it because I spend so much time making movies. Maybe that's my saving grace, maybe that's the thing that has helped me. I spend my time making movies, not reflecting on where I am now.

Q. You've already signed up to star in a sequel to "Pitch Black." What draws you to the Riddick character?

A. I think that in the 1980s we had heroes who were whitewashed, and I think now the public doesn't really gravitate to that kind of hero. We get invested more in flawed heroes and anti-heroes. I think people are less judgmental--we don't care if the character is perfect. I like the idea that in "Pitch Black" you end up rooting for a guy who's introduced to you as a convicted killer, and you find the goodness in him and you find heroism in him. That's interesting to me. I think he speaks to our generation. I mean, think about what artists are selling the most records. You've got everybody gravitating toward Eminem. The public's going to need a little bit more of an authentic hero--a flawed, imperfect hero to root for. We don't learn anything from the whitewashed heroes.

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Vin Diesel, in high gear

By Susan Wloszczyna

[USA TODAY](#)

2002-08-06

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — Vin Diesel can't help but make a big entrance, whether it's in his first starring vehicle or just striding into a room. As Xander Cage, the extreme-sports outlaw turned secret agent in XXX (pronounced "Triple X"), a raucous Red Bull-generation riff on 007 that opens Friday, he straddles a stolen Corvette as if it were an airborne skateboard after speeding off a suspension bridge and plunging toward the water.

Funny how James Bond never sky-surfed in his Aston Martin.

Cage also doesn't drink alcohol, rails against smoking, razzes authority figures ("*If you are going to shoot anyone, shoot the monkey who sold you that suit*") and prefers games on a PlayStation rather than at a casino.

Today, Diesel bursts through the door with baby-blue shades, a torso-clinging white T-shirt, crisp jeans, a pricey Contax camera (a gift from Revolution, the production house behind XXX) swinging from his brawny neck and a goofy-kid grin. Why not smile? The almost-famous guy, who toiled for nine years as a bouncer before being discovered by Steven Spielberg, currently is worth \$20 million a film and rising.

As an admiring Tom Hanks, commander and mentor in Diesel's major screen break, 1998's Saving Private Ryan, puts it: **"He's Vin, hellbent to change the industry in his own image. Without a doubt, everybody in that movie was going places. But Vin already had achievement (including two directing projects,**

the 1994 short Multi-Facial and 1997's Strays) and confidence behind him. His single-headed pursuit of what he wanted was there."

Even Diesel's aftershave, whose heady scent trails him, reeks of confidence despite the razor burn that dots his cheek. Can he, at 35, connect to the teens and twentysomethings who are XXX's prime PG-13 target? No problem, he says. He and director Rob Cohen, 53, who also was behind the wheel of last year's Diesel-fueled sleeper hit, *The Fast and the Furious*, **"always stay really close to the pulse of the youth of America,"** Diesel says. **"We know what's going on."**

Besides, **"I'm from New York. You get a timeless cool card in New York. You know how Robert De Niro has a timeless cool card?"**

Yeah, sure. So what makes the Vinster think he should get \$10 million for XXX when he has never been test-driven as a movie lead before?

"Deal-making goes on with any job," he says. **"If a \$90 million film is riding on your shoulders, you get it. I was saying what I thought was fair. If you knew what XXX was going to be, and you knew by doing it you couldn't do a *Fast and the Furious* sequel (for which he supposedly asked \$30 million), that right there puts a price on it."**

Anyway, you can't blame Diesel if executives such as Revolution founder Joe Roth are willing to pay the inflated tab at the pump, plus double that princely sum for an in-the-works XXX follow-up.

Says Roth: **"Oh, what can I say? He was unwilling to work for less. Ultimately, we needed him. I didn't think anyone else could head a franchise for this generation."**

Indeed, at a time when good ol' Sly's and Arnie's box office muscle has gone slack and less-buff youngsters such as Tobey Maguire, Matt Damon and Ben Affleck are trying to be convincing as heroes, Diesel is the missing link between eras. He has the build all right, but also the theater-trained talent (unlike his closest rival, The Rock, a wrestler) to raise the action stakes to the next licensed-to-thrill level.

As Cohen says of Diesel: **"He can act. He is dedicated. He has an inner truth meter about his character that's a great assistance to me. The fact that he has arms like a comic-book god and the voice of the devil are just the bonuses."**

And in XXX, where his novice spy doesn't always have the answers and figures out the rules as he snowboards and rock-climbs along, he injects vulnerability into the mix. **"His vulnerable side makes him able to relate to the widest possible audience,"** Cohen says. **"Fans can say, 'Yeah, he is special, but he is also kind of like me.' "**

In a post-Sept. 11 environment, that isn't a bad trait to flash, especially if you want to be a magnet for women as well as men. The marketing folks haven't been shy: The XXX posters showcase Diesel's biceps as if they were the testosterone equivalent of cleavage.

Then again, a female-led debate was sparked at a XXX screening about whether the actor, who at least physically gives off an Elmer Fudd meets the Incredible Hulk vibe, qualifies as a sex symbol. Opinion was evenly divided, but his co-stars past and present leave no doubt how their vote is cast.

Says his *Furious* love interest, Michelle Rodriguez, whom he admits to dating at one time: **"It's that raspy voice that gets you. You won't ever hear a story about him being (a jerk) to people. He's not (a jerk) kind of actor. That's one thing that will assure at least that I'm open to always being his friend."**

As for Asia Argento, the Italian spitfire who plays his romantic foil in XXX, the sizzle wasn't fake. **"He kissed me and it was like 'Whooo!' It was like a real kiss. The way he carries himself in the world is like a king. He is very confident, smart and deep."**

Right now, Diesel is more vulnerable than normal. He is coping with a cold that muffles his distinctive gargle-with-gravel growl and causes the usually restless actor to be even more so as he zips into the bathroom several times to discreetly clear his throat.

But he carries on. As this onetime telemarketer who grew up poor and ambitious on the streets of Greenwich Village knows, the sell is the thing. Especially when you are selling yourself.

But it can take a toll. **"I'm a little under the weather,"** he explains. **"I'm just over ... "**

Overtired, overstressed, overworked?

"Over everything."

Including, perhaps, as overexposed as the bald head that he mows himself once a week.

It wasn't always the case. Diesel's never-revealed racial and ethnic makeup (best guess: Italian and black)

allows him to be a melting-pot Everylug, a sort of Anthony Quinn for a new century. He has carefully cultivated an air of mystery since he entered the public consciousness, refusing to discuss his personal history.

Since then, he has been a standout as the voice of an animated alien in *The Iron Giant* (1999), a shady stockbroker in *Boiler Room* (2000), a scary sci-fi convict in *Pitch Black* (2000) and the pec-pumped patriarch of a gang of street racers in *Furious*. But popularity has caused Diesel's coveted cover to pretty much evaporate like so many gas fumes.

Especially after a string of recent magazine interviews where, with no apologies, he made such boasts as **"I've always thought I was a celebrity. It was the rest of the world that hadn't figured it out."**

Just go to the Internet and you'll figure out almost all you need to know about the Diesel file. His real name (Mark Vincent). His hobbies (he's a Dungeons & Dragons freak). The breeds and names of his dogs (Italian mastiff Roman and Staffordshire bull terrier Winston, who now resides with a friend). Gossip-hounds sniffed out that he recently shared a chocolate souffle and some laughs with Nicole Kidman at the Polo Lounge.

Diesel had a birthday on July 18, along with his non-identical twin, Paul, a film editor. His mother is an astrologer/psychologist, but she never did his horoscope. **"She said she was too close to me to do an unbiased chart."** But he had access to her books and reveals he's not just a Cancer, but one with Scorpio rising and a Sagittarius moon.

A little online research reveals Scorpio rising *"gives you a strong physique and tremendous physical stamina ... you assiduously stick to your goals as long as there is a chance they will be achieved."* As for Sagittarius moon, *"Your inner self feels more complete when you are allowed to investigate and search for adventure."*

Sounds as if it was in the stars that he would be an action star. Still, there is a sense that Diesel, whose own cinematic heroes growing up included Sidney Poitier, Marlon Brando and Martin Scorsese, would rather not be locked into the genre that has so enthusiastically embraced him.

At least he could be the thinking person's action dude. To that end, his production company, One Race, plans to start shooting in February a bio epic of Hannibal the Carthaginian general, written by David Franzoni (*Gladiator*).

The main drawback to fame, he says, is the feeling that every choice and every statement will be scrutinized somehow. **"The simplest of questions are confusing now. Because they are so official."**

When his lunch order is requested, he almost becomes paralyzed at the thought of revealing his menu choices to the media. But Diesel does not live by studio bread alone, so he selects carefully: **"Grilled free-range chicken breast with mashed potatoes, then a mixed-greens salad with vinaigrette."**

Diesel has found a surefire way to escape such pressures. Travel. **"I find it more and more medicinal every year."** He just backpacked through Europe with one of his homies. **"We used to hustle for spare change to get large French fries and a chocolate shake."**

Oops. Back to the food. **"My mom insisted on multigrain bread and never allowed soda in the house. We never had sugared cereal. Ever. I'd sleep over at my friend's house just so I could have Honey Nut Cheerios in the morning."**

Chances are, no matter how full his plate is, Vin Diesel is going to stay hungry for a long time.

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Watch Out Bond, 'XXX' Unleashes Diesel Power

August 08

[Reuters](#)

By Bob Tourtellotte

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - By now everyone knows Vin Diesel, star of the new "XXX" action flick debuting on Friday, is the next biggest thing on Hollywood's list of super spies.

So, what's the brash former bouncer turned movie star doing admitting he's not the fearless man he's made out to be?

James Bond never would. No, not 007.

"I'm afraid of my own shadow," the tattooed muscleman with the shaved head told reporters recently.

Then, as if to convince the tough pack of entertainment journalists, he let out a harmless little yelp, "OOOhh."

That's right, a high-pitched yelp from Vin Diesel, who in the movie plays an extreme sports hero of the Internet culture, Xander Cage, a.k.a. XXX.

Cage does everything from driving a Corvette off a bridge and parachuting to safety, to jumping over an exploding cocaine factory on his dirt bike dodging bullets all the while. "Ooooh!"

And, we now know, he's got this touchy, feely, yelpy side, too. This is a new sort of super spy, this XXX, and he's tailor-made for a new audience.

Bond -- whether the Sean Connery Bond of the 1960s or the current Pierce Brosnan Bond -- you're not the bomb, anymore.

This generation gets its kicks from digital music and computer files instead of vinyl grooves and hi-fi stereo.

It would rather snowboard in the California Sierra than ski the French Alps.

That was back in the day. This is a totally new way.

NEW STAR

Diesel, star of 2001 smash hit about illegal car racing on the mean streets of Los Angeles, "The Fast and the Furious," has risen in his own fast and furious way in Hollywood.

His early work as a bar bouncer helped him build the rugged persona on display as XXX, an anti-hero who is recruited by a secret U.S. agency to wipe out Eastern European anarchists.

But the tough exterior and gravel voice he wielded as a weapon when bouncing didn't help him become a star. **"When you're bouncing, every single thing you say has to be reinforced with a subtle threat,"** Diesel said.

"You come into a room and say, 'Hi, I'm Vin Diesel,' and you have the threat of, 'If you don't like me, I'll punch you in the face,' which is not really what you want when you're going on auditions," he added.

So what, or who in this case, helped Diesel get started? Steven Spielberg. The director put Diesel in "Saving Private Ryan," which led to an independent film, "Boiler Room," in which he played a hard-charging broker alongside Ben Affleck.

In both, Diesel's performance was stand-out.

Then, came "The Fast and The Furious," with Diesel as the leader of a gang of freight truck hijackers. But, of course, his Dominic Toretto was a bad guy with a really good heart.

There were other movies in between, like thriller "Pitch Black." But it truly has been in the last year with the buildup for "XXX" that Diesel turned from just another cool leading man to a certified Hollywood hottie and magazine cover boy.

"I don't know how it happened," said the yelper. **"It's news to me. It's crazy, 'cause I wasn't a pretty boy."**

"It could be in part due to the fact that the characters I play are, you know, representative of our culture now or representative of angst ... The characters I play are anti-heroes and don't pretend to be perfect."

NEW AGE

Unlike Bond, always a British agent and proud of it, XXX is reluctant to join a group he despises most -- government cops -- but he feels an obligation to his country. God bless XXX, and his tattoos.

After a series of training exercises to measure his mettle hatched by recruiting Agent Augustus Gibbons (Samuel L. Jackson), XXX goes after the bad guys, headquartered in Prague and operating under the name, Anarchy 99.

The terrorist group has hatched a plot to launch a series of missiles from a roving submarine navigating the world's oceans. Anarchy 99 figures if it can blow up enough cities, it can plunge the world into chaos.

Early reviews for "XXX" are in. Daily Variety said it should be titled "\$\$\$" not "XXX" because "few film projects in recent times have been so brazenly customized and tooled for maximum (box office) power."

But the young guys and gals that "XXX" targets don't read newspaper reviews, anyway. It is, after all, a new age.

Here's a posted message on a Yahoo! board: "'XXX' is going to kick @\$\$, so Vin, keep up the good work ... your (sic) a very good actor and a very hot actor ... I just know 'XXX' is going to be good. I've been waiting since the first preview."

Watch out James, XXX is in the house.

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Big, bad and bald

It's all about control for Vin Diesel

[Creative Loafing](#)

2002-08-07

BY BERT OSBORNE

He's buff. He's bald. He's monosyllabic. He's covered with all sorts of funky tattoos. He's Xander Cage, an underground X-Games aficionado recruited by Uncle Sam (as in Samuel L. Jackson) for a secret government mission to foil a gang of stereotypical Russian bio-terrorists in XXX (opening Aug. 9). It's yet another action-packed vehicle for star -- and newly anointed executive producer -- Vin Diesel, 35, whose promising early work in films such as Saving Private Ryan and Boiler Room seems to have paved the way for his specialization in playing strong-and-silent types in more recent movies like Pitch Black and The Fast and the Furious.

Creative Loafing: This is your second movie with director Rob Cohen. He says you became "Mr. Cool" after the success of The Fast and the Furious, but that you're about to become "Mr. Hot" once XXX opens. What has that adjustment been like for you?

Vin Diesel: I'm completely unaware of any adjustment. I've been so entrenched in the movies I'm making, you know? The post-production phase for XXX was a lot shorter than most movies. We just wrapped in April, so the effect of it all hasn't really set in yet. I don't have any idea of what may or may not happen as a result of this new movie.

Come on. You can't be oblivious to seeing yourself on the cover of magazines like GQ, can you?

I'm not oblivious to it. I love it. OK. I do have a sense that things are changing for me, actually, but I come from a hard-working background. I come from the type of people who are always moving forward and staying proactive. In a way, that's been my saving grace. While people are speculating about XXX, I've been in story meetings about The Chronicles of Riddick [an upcoming sequel to Pitch Black], or talking to writers about [the proposed biopic] Hannibal the Conquerer.

Well, does being on the threshold of superstardom excite you or intimidate you?

It probably intimidates me more than anything, because I don't know what that's all about. If that means a further dwindling away of my privacy, then that's not so good, but if it means a greater ability to make the films I've always dreamed of making, then that's great.

Cohen also says you initially passed on this project until the studio came up with more money for you.

Did he say that? It wasn't so much about the money as it was about being involved on a more hands-on level. [Diesel is credited as one of the movie's executive producers.] I wanted some basic consultation rights regarding all the different elements that went into making the film, because I want to be accountable for the movies I'm doing. After talking to Rob about XXX, I bought into the project conceptually more than anything else. I liked where this guy was coming from. I liked the character's arc, how he starts out using his skills as part of a reckless hobby but learns to turn them into secret-agent strengths. He's basically a nihilist who's so indifferent to everything that he's the last person you'd expect to become heroic.

The physical demands of this role are fairly obvious, but there's also a perception that action movies like this require less acting skill. Would you agree?

I wouldn't, and I don't approach it that way, either. In my experience, it doesn't matter whether I'm making an action-packed movie like this, a gritty ensemble piece like Saving Private Ryan, or a hip-hop homage to Glengarry Glen Ross like Boiler Room. I still feel obligated to approach every project with the same craftsmanship I've applied to any other.

Don't call him the new Stallone!

Vin Diesel says he isn't filling anyone's shoes

By Bill Muller

8/7/2002

[Reno Gazette Journal](#)

Whether it's the distinctive name, the rugged good looks, the husky baritone or his testosterone-charged performance as an outlaw street racer in "The Fast and the Furious," there's little doubt Vin Diesel has arrived.

In Hollywood, everyone's calling him the next Sylvester Stallone or Arnold Schwarzenegger. Everyone, that is, except Diesel himself.

"I don't think I'm the next anyone," says Diesel, who plays an extreme-sports star turned spy in "XXX," which opens Friday Aug. 9. **"I think that I'm just really doing my thing and just trying to make films that I think are entertaining and make films that I'd like to see and, basically, to put as much blood as I can into each film."**

"At the same time, I'm flattered to be compared to any actor that's had such a long successful run as those guys, in whatever genre. The fact that those guys have worked so long and brought so many great films to fruition, that's kind of cool."

Although Diesel is downplaying such comparisons, "XXX" director Rob Cohen thinks Diesel is the perfect action-star for the new millennium: multiethnic (he's half Black, and half Italian-American), irreverent, physically imposing and, Cohen says, quite talented.

"He's there with top spin," says Cohen, who also directed Diesel in "The Fast and the Furious," **"because the guy can really act. You've got a theater-trained actor with the body of a boxer, of an athlete. He's got the gravelly voice, and he's got a surprising vulnerability."**

"So you take that acting power, combined with his action athleticism, his great voice and this charm and his multiethnicity — you get a very potent new force."

In a scant four years, Diesel has gone from bar bouncer (where he got his stage name) and struggling actor to magazine-cover boy with a series of performances that turned Hollywood heads.

"It was a slow burn," says Diesel, whose real name is Mark Vincent. **"There were some people that perked up from 'Saving Private Ryan' (in which Diesel portrayed doomed Pvt. Adrian Carpazo), not a lot."**

Two years later, in the sci-fi movie "Pitch Black," Diesel played a convict with the ability to see in the dark, a skill that comes in handy when his spaceship crash-lands on a planet ravaged by nocturnal predators. In "Boiler Room," he did a turn as a hotshot stockbroker who talks hapless investors into worthless deals.

Diesel says those two movies helped showcase his range.

"When 'Pitch Black' and 'Boiler Room' came out on the same presidential weekend of 2000, that's when people started really lining up," he says. **"That's when it really, really started, because it was two contrasting roles."**

At the same time, Diesel sees some of himself in each part he plays, including Xander Cage in "XXX."

"I think we both kind of have always had this problem with authority I think we're both extremely independent," he says of his character. **"And we both probably don't take ourselves too serious at times."**

Ironically, Diesel's success stemmed from his failure to be recognized as an actor. In 1994, he poured his frustration into a 20-minute short, "Multi-Facial," in which he played an actor auditioning for a series of roles, claiming different ethnicity on each interview but always going home empty-handed.

"The whole reason I was bouncing was to leave my days open for training, auditions and theater," he says of his work at New York bars. **"After 20 years, you get, I guess, frustrated to some kind of boiling point. Then I felt like I had to go make a film, a short film; that's how it started."**

Luckily, one of the people who ultimately saw "Multi-Facial" was director Steven Spielberg.

"That's what was wild about it," Diesel says. **"I did 'Multi-Facial' out of frustration and out of a need to be artistic, then a couple years later, Steven Spielberg sees it and writes a role in 'Saving Private Ryan' for me. So that's bizarre. That was a Hollywood fairy tale."**

Although those roles were solid building blocks, Diesel didn't hit the A-list until "The Fast and the Furious" grossed a surprising \$144 million last year. The movie was written with Paul Walker as the star, but Diesel stole the show as the film's antihero.

"I think that I always was optimistic about it and working toward it being a great film," Diesel says of "F/F," "and it felt like it was turning into a great film. But you never really know until the film comes out."

There's going to be a sequel to that outlaw-racing film, but neither Cohen nor Diesel will be involved. The director says he doesn't think there's anything fresh left in the idea, while Diesel reportedly asked for too much money.

Besides, they're busy trying to reinvent the spy movie with "XXX," replacing cloak and dagger with tattoos and snowboards, and a new hero: Diesel's Xander Cage.

"The overall objective was to make something fresh and new," the actor says. "You think of the other spies as having accolades on their walls from being at the head of their class at spy school, and that's just not Xander."

Of course, the film called for Diesel to utilize his physical prowess, and there were some scary moments, including riding along on the back of a speeding hydrofoil.

"The water was so cold, a person couldn't last two minutes in the water without being subjected to hypothermia," he says. "And I wasn't fastened — I'm standing on top of this concave shell roof and I'm speeding along and no life preserver, and I have to lean over and act out all these things. It was a tough balancing act with high stakes."

Diesel also took 10 weeks of extreme-sports training to make sure he exhibited the nervy fearlessness that permeates the athletic pursuit. But he already had some experience in that aspect of the film.

"Growing up in New York, we did really crazy things," he says.

"Hanging on the back of a New York City cab on roller blades going 40 miles an hour up Eighth Avenue in rush-hour traffic ain't the smartest thing in the world."

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Craig Kilborn Chat Transcript

2002-08-07

Craig Kilborn-What's up?

They love you man!

Vin Diesel -They're amazing. I do it for them.

C-How are you doing?

V-I'm doing good. I'm a little under the weather.

C-You don't seem like it.

V-Yeah

C-You seem like a kinda guy that a little germs just run away from.

V-No,no,no *[in the background]*

C- You laugh at those germs. Try vodka-kills everything.

V-*[smiling]*

C- Got sore throat it.....

V-I tried*(the name of the medicine he tried)*

C-That knocks you out buddy

V-No, I took the non-drowsy one.

C-Oh, Is that make you Hyper or what...(while Vin's talking)

V-and it was like my heart *(beating his chest)* was beating for 2 days.

C-You don't need that...

V-Yea

Someone said it will knock me out, but didn't.

C-You got sick 'cause you were working so hard?

V-Yea and just the jet-lag and the travel.

C-Where have you been?

V-I was in Europe and I just got back to start the press launch for xXx.

C-right,and xXx.....Have you filmed that over in Europe, right?

Were you just over Europe filming something else?

V-No, I just went over to Europe to go on vacation.

C-Aha

V- See, I took some friends of mine from New York, they grew up with me.

C-You had to be sick there,'cuz you probably were drinking like crazy.

V-Right *(laughs)*

C-Right,-I don't know.....

V-I've been out of the loop, you gonna have to show me where to go around here.

C-Oh really, you know what the big story.....oh, you've been gone for a while.

You know what the big story is in US?

Well, this is the big story, man *(pulls out GQ and Entertainment weekly)*-right here-look at that!

C-[claps]

You want me to make fun of you?

V-I love it, I love it (while C said you want me to..), go ahead, have fun.

C-[shows GQ-laughs at Vin's "love it, love it go ahead-comment]

No, I just like the guys work their upper body and they ignore the legs. Look at the little bird leg on

Vin Diesel! *[holding GQ]*

V-*[claps, smiles]*

C-No, squats for you...Come on.

V-*[says something , -I cant make out what-]*

C-I hope in xXx you not in shorts man. No, I'm just kidding, my brother and I used to..we used be body-builders, we used to watch these guys, and if they weren't proportioned perfectly we would point that out and else...But are you.....

V-Is this the part when I suppose to take my pants off?.....

[laughs]

C-There are 3 men out there who were saying YEA....No...

V-*[head down, smiling]*

C-Do you still work out like crazy?

V-Yes, I do. Depends on what role I'm doing and then train for that role.

-I laugh so much on this show that when I leave the show for like days after I'm still grinning.

C-Yeah

V-You have no idea how hysterical it is up here...

C-Yea,'cause You know What is is? You pointed out last time. The audience on this show is like really close to us..

V-Very close,very connected

C-and

V-We all (in it?) together

C-Yeah

V-We making it together, we all part of something.

C-How was the shoot for xXx?What were the countries you went?

V-We went to Prague,we shot in LA for few weeks.

C-Oh, you got to go to LA...

V-Yea, that was fun-scary-the currency is a little.....but we went to Prague, we went to the Austrian Alps and Bora Bora.

C-Now, that's exotic.... Is Bora-Bora.....?

V-Bora-Bora is amazing, it's beautiful. Have you ever been to Bora-Bora?*[asks the audience]*

C-Nooooooo*[looking at the audience]*

V-She's like YEAH, right on-pointing at someone in the audience.

C-They not movie stars, they don't get to travel all over.

V-Yea,well, I didn't get to travel either so. I grew up.....You guys know Manhattan..You think that the world beyond Hudson river is all waste land-so..we never travelled, I mean...some of the guys I took to Europe..never been to Europe, so.

C-They appreciated?

V-Yeah

C-They had to go nuts...

V-Yea, they were going crazy.

C-So, what did you do? Was there any problems in Bora-Bora filming or not?

V-Well, um, there were some, um, actually one of the scariest shoot days was in Bora Bora. I, I grew up with Jaws. Being a movie that scared the shit out of me.

C-So you are probably always afraid of going into the ocean.

V-To some degree, I have a healthy respect for...Steven Spielberg movies...

C- Sure, sure...

V- Anyways... ~aside~ It's a joke, it's... ~gestures "never mind"~ Uhm...so there's this one shot, we go out to

Bora Bora and the director, Rob Cohen, wants to end the shot in the movie with Asia Argento and I jumping into a sea of fish. Does that make sense?

So we are out in the middle of the ocean and the props master is throwing chum, fish chum, into the water. We are on the edge of a barge and we're supposed to jump in. And as the shot goes on and after they try to perfect it, bigger fish start to come. And there is a moray eel that is right next to Camera A's foot...

C- Those are cool looking, right?

V-Yeah, they're dangerous, they kill you like that. ~snaps~ And they are talking about us jumping down, they want us to get a little bit lower. And the guy, the camera operator who has the moray eel threatening to kill him, is trying to hold focus.

So we make it through this, and we, I kayaked out to the set, so I kayaked with Asia Argento, we kayaked out to the set and we go back and a couple of hours later... They have rooms in Bora Bora where they have that you could... the coffee table has a glass cutout that you could look and see fish...

C-Oh, yeah, okay..

V-It's amazing...it's like... and you could jump off your balcony into the ocean, right? And I would jump off the balcony every morning, every afternoon, every night and I am just about to jump off and I see this large, like the size of this desk, a shark swim underneath it and I realize, these morons had me jumping off into a sea of fish with sharks. And they were telling me there were no sharks there. I just saw a shark at the bottom of my

...

C-That's terrible.

V-How can you tell me there are no sharks I just saw at the bottom of my coffee table.

C-If you had seen that earlier, you would not have jumped in...

V-No I wouldn't have...

C- There would be no scene.

V-No, no, no...no scene, no nothing

C-No Triple X...they would've had to cut that scene out...

V-Game over. Yes.

C-That's scary. Never work with those people again. They lied to you.

V-They are evil. Never, they are liars. They're deceptive.

C-It's time for 5 questions...music playing....

Question #1 Other than the Chevy Malibu, what is a car that has a location in the name? This is hard, no one has gotten this. Other than the Chevy Malibu, what is a car that has a location in the name? anything comes to mind?

V-Monty Carlo

C-There it it folks...(he points at VIN...and the audience applause..)

Question #2 - What is the French word for wine?

V-VIN ...

C-That's correct...

Question #3 - True or False. True or False. You have never bought or rented a XXX (triple X)-rated video.

V-(...A HUGE smile on VIN's face...stick out tongue...shakes head).

C-And I did talk to your manager...

V-HEY, I've never bought a triple...should I have bought

C-Rented or bought

V-Did I ever buy one of those...I think I was too nervous and I had someone else go and bought it for me...

C-That counts, that counts. So that's a TRUE. That's a FALSE. You have never bought...FALSE..You have and that FALSE.

V-Wait a minute...I never went in to purchase it

C-Whose money was it? It was your money

V-(...he thinks about it and try to explain how it happen...) Okay, I will explain how it happen. SO that we are clear....I was selling tools over the phone...and as a promotional...

C-Question #4 - Think of a flower. Think of it don't say it... you got it....Is it lilac?

V-No....

C-Incorrect...I love those

V-Whoa, this guy is trying to embrace me...

C-You once was a bouncer,

V-Yessssss...

C-...making a lots of money...Question #5 - Look into camera 2 and tell the folks at home why they're not getting into a club...you are a bouncer...tell the folks at home why they're not getting into a club.

V-Okay, I will do my best...(takes a deep breath and lick his lips and looks a Craig one more time before looking into camera #2...) Sorry, it's a private party tonight.. (audience Wha whooo...VIN smiles...) Who's guest list?... Kilborn's guest list?... Whose Kilborn?

The audience went crazy with applause and laughter

V-He does it to me, he does it to me...

C-(He tries to say incorrect, but the audience was still going crazy laughing and clapping...) In correct...

V-In correct? Is It a lilac? (*mocking Craig...*)...

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Vin Diesel: Thrill Seeker

Jumping, running, explosions, fast cars and hot women – Vin Diesel is living life xXx style.

[FilmForce.IGN.Com](#)

August 08, 2002 - Vin Diesel is no stranger to playing the anti-hero. In his breakthrough role as Riddick in Pitch Black, Diesel got the chance to show audiences his ability to portray a character who goes through a believable on screen transformation into someone who cares about his future and the future of those around him.

In xXx, Diesel once again gets to strap on the persona of the anti-hero, this time in the guide of Xander Cage, thrill seeker and underground website star. Diesel himself described Cage in this way: **"Xander represents the world. He represents anybody who has nothing going on. At the end of the day, Xander Cage is someone who ends up fighting for something and believing in something. That in itself is interesting. The story gets pushed even further by making him least likely to become a secret agent or work for the government. He's the antithesis of what a secret agent is."**

In order to believably show Xander's abilities, Diesel found himself engaging in some activities that are bound to make studio insurance policy holders wince. **"I trained with the best rock climbers,"** Diesel explained during a recent press tour for the film. **"I trained with the snowboarding experts and I trained with the best motocross experts and I dived with the Navy Seals. All of these phases of Xander's personality had to be worked out in pre-production."**

Of course, it's not like director Rob Cohen (The Fast and the Furious) had to twist Diesel's arm to get him to do all of these thing. **"I was at the Extreme Games last year and I'll be there this year. So I'm a thrill seeker myself, to some degree. I just completely enjoyed that process. I'm absolutely an adrenaline junkie."**

Something else that gets Diesel's adrenaline pumping is work behind the camera. The world's latest super spy used funds from telemarketing to finance an early film, Multi-Facial, in 1994 which helped to get him cast in Steven Spielberg's Saving Private Ryan. Having written, directed and starred in films, Diesel feels that he brings a little extra to his projects. **"Being a writer, director and actor makes me sensitive to the whole process."** Diesel pauses, thinking for a moment. **"I think primarily it makes me understand everyone's job a little better and it allows me to be a little more committed to the whole film. Any talent you can bring to the table is only going to help the whole picture."**

A commitment to the whole picture is something that Diesel was looking for from all involved, especially his director, Rob Cohen, a person Diesel has only praise for. **"Being able to work in an environment with a director that is so your partner and is so in your corner, and so ambitious... it's a great environment to work in. The two of you can be as ambitious as you want to be and know you have each other's back."**

Diesel also heaped praise upon his co-stars in xXx. **"[Asia Argento]... she was a real, real, real find. It was a blessing to find her. Her timing was impeccable. Her energy was impeccable. Her energy is astonishing. She elevated the film. She's just brilliant."** Then there's working with the man who brought back Shaft as a Jedi Knight – Samuel L. Jackson **"I've always been a huge Sam Jackson fan," Diesel enthused, "even pre-Pulp Fiction. The idea of working with him is a dream come true."**

Is xXx like that bad mother that Jackson played on screen? Diesel just smiles and nods.

"He's the guy that you call when you really have to take care of st. When s**t gets really f***ed up, you call xXx."**

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Fame game stumps Diesel

August 9, 2002

BY CINDY PEARLMAN
Chicago Sun-Times

LOS ANGELES--X marks the spot where Vin Diesel, 35, falls to the ground at a reporter's feet. On the floor of his hotel room, America's newest action star--a massive, tattooed baldy with bulging biceps--looks a lot more vulnerable than he does in his new movie "XXX," which opens today.

Diesel ascends into the \$20 million-a-movie stratosphere by playing Xander Cage--a James Bond for the new millennium. He's a ripped, tough, sexy charmer who is called on to save the world. However, Vin Diesel in real life is the last man up for that job.

Eyes shut tight and his body curled into the fetal position, Diesel moans from his carpet-hugging position and confesses, **"I haven't left the house in a month, and this movie hasn't even come out yet."**

It take a big man to admit he's afraid of something, and Vin Diesel is afraid of the fame that has already engulfed him. Recently, he says, he took what he calls his "anonymity tour."

"I went away on this trip to postpone the effects of stardom," he says. **"I went to France and all over Europe to just walk the streets. I hung out and did regular things. I call it the expensive version of backpacking, meaning there was room service or toilets. ... After this movie comes out, I won't be able to even do one of the trips again."**

Who exactly is Vin Diesel to command all this attention and subsequent fretting? That isn't an easy question to answer because thus far he's been evasive with the press. He's happy to talk about how he did a lot of his own stunts "and threw my spin out of whack" to make "XXX." And he'll tell you about the "two hours it took every single morning to put on all those tattoos."

What he doesn't seem to want to discuss is his heritage. It's been reported that Diesel is part Italian American and part African American. Diesel says he grew up in New York with a Caucasian mother and black stepfather. He considers himself multiracial and has named his new production company One Race Productions.

"That name is important to me because I like promoting humanity," he says. **"I like the idea of people being universal. That's why I named my company One Race. It means it's welcoming to all."**

There was a time when he wasn't doing much celebrating because life was tough for the son of a drama teacher stepdad and astrologer mom. Did his mom ever gave him any hints about his future? "She thought she was too close and couldn't give me an unbiased chart. I told her that I was going to be a movie star someday and she would just smile."

Those movie star days wouldn't happen for some years. **"I lived poor all my life,"** says the former club bouncer. **"I didn't have health benefits until I was 30 years old. You only have to make \$7,000 a year when you're a member of the Screen Actors Guild to get health insurance, and I couldn't get the number up that high."**

Diesel jumped to Hollywood's A-list with a starring role in last summer's \$200 million-grossing hit "The Fast and the Furious."

"While I was shooting 'Saving Private Ryan' with [all the pyrotechnics], I had no health insurance," he says. **"Every single night I would go to sleep scared to death that I would get injured and I wouldn't be able to pay for a hospital visit."**

During his really low days, he was regularly evicted from apartments in New York because being a part-time actor and bouncer didn't pay the bills. **"I would tuck the tags under the shirts I bought from the Gap, so I could return them at a later date."**

He recalls an incident at a store called the Wiz. **"Remember the commercial, 'Nobody beats the Wiz?' I think I beat the Wiz. I bought a word processor from them to write my first film 'Strays.' I wrote the script on it and then I returned it just hours before the 30-day limit was up to get your cash back."**

Now he's Hollywood's hottest property. "XXX" has such red-hot buzz that fans are reacting to the trailer like they're at a rock concert. The actor still claims he's nervous and asks the journalist, **"So, did you like it? Did the audience dig it?"** Inform him that at the first Los Angeles screening, the minute his name popped up, the audience began to scream and stomp their feet.

"Why?" says a clearly perplexed Diesel. **"I have no ----- idea why everyone suddenly likes me so much."** His next question isn't typically asked by the Next Big Thing.

"So what do I do now?"

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Vin Diesel is hot

I know lusting after this big ugly hunk of a man is ridiculous -- but it's not just physical. Really.

Salon.com

By Janelle Brown

Aug. 9, 2002 | Vin Diesel is not a likely icon of lust. He is a big, ugly hunk of a man with dubious acting skills and the growling Brooklyn accent of a mechanic. He's best known for a string of big-budget B movies -- "Pitch Black," "The Fast and the Furious" -- with ludicrous premises and even worse dialogue. Yet he's suddenly commanding upwards of \$11 million a picture; and if his latest film, "XXX," is the hit it's supposed to be, he's essentially Hollywood's hottest new star. Most curious of all, however, this ridiculous actor exudes some kind of magnetic draw on my friends, girlfriends and -- oh dear -- even myself.

It's bad, this Vin thing. An otherwise reasonable friend of mine -- the erudite director of a nonprofit, not typically prone to bouts of teenage swoon -- recently told me that she had the hots for Diesel. "He's just a raw hunk of a man," she said, a mild expression of embarrassment flickering across her face. "You know: Pull my hair and make love to me!"

Yes, but the culture is full of manly hunks. So how else to explain Diesel's overpowering magnetism? Entertainment Weekly, which -- along with nearly every other magazine on the planet -- plastered him on its cover last week, under the headline "The Fast and Furious Rise of Vin Diesel," has posited that he is essentially a capable body that dropped out of the sky at the right moment. One agent pointed out that Schwarzenegger, Stallone and Willis are too old, and that Diesel just fell into place.

Certainly, this is true: For years, the screen has been empty of compelling ass-kicking action heroes. Hollywood has attempted to pass off a number of utterly unconvincing pretty boy actors as two-fisted idols -- Matt Damon, Ben Affleck, Keanu Reeves (except for "The Matrix" Keanu) -- who were too self-involved with their own moral and intellectual torments to truly be heroes. The Rock, the only other traditional action star to debut in the last few years (by way of the WWF and "Scorpion King") simply bulged his way through his film.

But Vin Diesel has taken the best of traditional action heroism -- the watermelon muscles, the lumpen voice, the stoic ambivalence to pain of all kinds -- and given it a contemporary dose of irony. In a way, he's the perfect 21st century hero: a bad guy who's really a good guy, who isn't necessarily Wittgenstein but is certainly smarter than he looks. Not pretty, but not too beefy either: Just a dose of testosterone with a heart of gold (once you dig down) and biceps of steel, with enough self-consciousness about the campiness of the whole endeavor to make cheesy action flicks entertaining again. He makes it possible to find him absurd and irresistible at the same time.

There are other obvious reasons for the Vin Diesel swoon. First, there's the delightful name -- reminiscent of greasy motorcycles and the Italian mafia -- which is simply too good to be true (it isn't). Then there's the unforgettable profile: both his body, enormous without being muscle-bound a la Stallone or Schwarzenegger; and his head, with that bulbous bumpy bald pate, an oversized noggin that goes on forever. Finally, there's the voice; a slow, bemused growl, a low-rent bedroom baritone.

For the women who confess to loving him, Vin Diesel exudes an odd sort of sexual charisma. No woman I know would actually call him good-looking, but several confessed to melting over his softer-edged version of beefy masculinity. This is a man, after all, who shows up in his latest film wearing a fur coat, a fashion statement that is at once openly effeminate and self-consciously masculine (only a man confident enough with his own testosterone levels would don a fur).

"He was a New York bouncer," one friend tells me, as if that explains everything, and in a way it does: the fashion sense, the cocky attitude, the muscles. "You have to admire him for making it so big."

My male friends, on the other hand, tend to roll their eyes and groan when I beg them for their opinions, offended that I would waste my time admiring a hokey action star. My male friends are, it should be said, mostly sensitive film geeks unimpressed by another man's biceps; but judging by box office receipts, they must be in the minority. "I can't believe you're writing about that doofus," one said crossly, forcing me to cough with embarrassment and pretend I was just "curious about the Vin phenomenon." "He can't act!"

But while Vin Diesel is no Alec Guinness, whether he can really act is beside the point. Vin Diesel's most prestigious films were also his smallest roles: in "Boiler Room" and "Saving Private Ryan," he plays the gruffly good-humored Italian-American lug who doesn't quite grasp what's going on around him. In both films, there's a suggestion that he's actually an actor who might be able to do something with a fully developed role. But his subsequent rise to stardom has been propelled by schlock pics like "Pitch Black" and "The Fast and the Furious," where his acting has consisted primarily of oozing a cool charisma; and in its own way, that

alone is more than enough.

Both these films were, to put it mildly, mind-numbing and ridiculous. I loved both. Because of Vin Diesel.

In "Pitch Black," he plays Riddick, a calmly confident convicted murderer who can see in the dark -- the only hope for a group of hapless travelers stranded with hungry aliens on a planet of eternal night. In "The Fast and the Furious," he's Dominick Toretto, a calmly confident convicted felon who has a way with race cars -- the only hope for a hapless detective who hopes to break a truck-jacking ring. His purpose in "Pitch Black" is mostly to lurk menacingly in corners, gaze stoically out into the lethal night and deliver groaner lines while he kills aliens with his bare hands ("He did not know who he was fuckin' with"). In "The Fast and the Furious," he calmly crashes cars at 170 miles an hour, pontificates about family values and delivers howlers like: "I live my life a quarter mile at a time." Of course, in both films, he saves everyone's asses and turns out to be a big softy.

In the preposterous "XXX," a kind of James Bond thriller for the Playstation crowd, he once again plays "the best and brightest of the bottom of the barrel." Xander Cage is a tattooed, husky underground action sports hero who likes to steal cars from senators who ban rap music; he is recruited as an expendable body by the NSA in order to infiltrate a band of anarchists who are planning the apocalypse when they aren't busy having sex with strippers. Vin Diesel's purpose in this movie, much as it was in "The Fast and the Furious" and "Pitch Black," is to deliver teen-friendly one-liners like "Don't be a dick, Dick" with a cocky expression on his face; to flex his tattoos and look macho as he jumps off the back of a motorcycle or snowboards out of an avalanche.

"XXX" is absurd -- scene after implausible scene of direct rip-offs from spy thrillers and sports videos, complete with clichéd dialogue and one-dimensional bad guys. Sitting in the movie theater surrounded by the teenage boys this movie was made for (along with, not surprisingly, a large number of gay men), I felt ridiculous. But I loved the sheer spectacle, and Vin Diesel looked great -- arresting even -- in that fur coat and sly expression.

Diesel may be a straight-ahead action hero for the 15-year-old boys who flock to his movies; but for adults like myself, who prefer more thoughtful fare but every once in a while like to indulge in a slice of Hollywood cheese, he is ultimately a camp icon. The best action movies these days have a certain self-awareness about the silliness of their endeavors. In 1985, film critic Pauline Kael wrote that "a Sylvester Stallone hit movie has the same basic appeal as professional wrestling or demolition derbies: audiences hoot at it and get a little charged up at the same time." The same could be said about Diesel oeuvre. But unlike "Rambo" or "Rocky," which took themselves very seriously -- Stallone's protruding lower lip, his drooping scowl, were somehow supposed to conjure up American fortitude itself -- films like "XXX" and "The Fast and the Furious" know exactly what they are: sexy schlock with big bangs, big boys and even bigger budgets. (To be fair, in "XXX" Xander Cage is also supposed to represent America, too; but a young, irreverent America that drives vintage GTOs and jumps from planes with stars-and-stripes 'chutes).

Vin Diesel bears some resemblance to all three of the aforementioned holy trinity of contemporary action heroes -- Willis, Schwarzenegger, Stallone -- but personality-wise he's closest to Willis (in his "Die Hard" days, as opposed to his "Sixth Sense" or "Story of Us" days). Willis had a brain underneath all that brawn, and delivered his punch lines with a wry arch of his eyebrows that made you believe that he thought action films were a ridiculous, if lucrative, lark. Like Willis, Diesel also seems to be having a fine old time in his films: He saunters through the scenes as if he were on a sightseeing tour of Paris. He rarely breaks out into a full grin, let alone a laugh (though he has a fine deep laugh), but there often is a smile just below the surface of even his silliest lines. Again like Willis, he's in on the joke too.

When, in "XXX," he is thrown out of a speeding airplane and dragged along a runway in a parachute, he brushes the dust off with a sly grin on his face: "I live for this shit," he exclaims, just like an overgrown teenager. "Let's do it again!" And you really do believe that he loves those kinds of silly stunts, both on-screen and off, simply because he knows how juvenile they are.

Or perhaps these are just the traits that I want to attribute to him, perhaps to make my own moviegoing a little more intellectually palatable. Unfortunately, Vin Diesel doesn't seem to be a great ironist off-screen; by all accounts, he has taken his stardom very seriously, and very methodically manhandled his way into Hollywood. A Hollywood friend told me a second-hand but convincing story about Diesel's arrival in town in the mid-1990s: Meeting with agents after his debut short film "Multi-Facial," Diesel would confidently growl, "You better sign me up now, while you can afford me. I'm going to be a star."

This is a man who demanded \$30 million to be in the sequel to "The Fast and the Furious," and refused to appear when the producers wouldn't fork out (he said he had too many franchises already -- "Riddick," the follow-up to "Pitch Black," and a sequel to "XXX"). Ballsy as it was, he probably deserved the money. "Fast and the Furious 2" deserves to tank without him: Wussy little Paul Walker, with his curly blond hair and delicate features, was certainly not the reason that the original movie sold some \$144 million worth of theater

tickets.

But Diesel would be wise to save his cash while he can. He may never become a Harrison Ford, Mel Gibson or Bruce Willis -- thoughtful action heroes who aged gracefully out of their wife-beater tank tops and into grown-up dramatic roles. But he seems to have a touch more depth, and a better sense of humor, than a Stallone or Schwarzenegger, who were ultimately useful to us only as icons of muscle-bound masculinity. If Vin Diesel turns out to have one shtick, and one shtick only, he will certainly fade from the screen as our idea of an action hero changes once again.

I get the sense that my girlfriends who adore Vin Diesel wouldn't really know what to do with him if he showed up on their doorstep and actually begged to make love to them. Part of the fun of lusting after Diesel is the fact that it's just so silly to do so. So perhaps what is ultimately so enjoyable about our latest action throb is that he seems to be so very much enjoying what he does: You just can't help but get the sense that Vin Diesel's favorite role is himself. And even if Diesel is almost 100 percent artifice -- the name, the muscles, the sex appeal -- it's an illusion that goes down as easily as a pint of Cherry Garcia ice cream, with the same slight twinge of guilt.

The X factor

BY CARY DARLING

[Miami Herald](#)

Vin Diesel, the multiracial Manhattan muscle man who was propelled bald-head first into the media glare by last summer's cinematic high-octane blast, *The Fast and the Furious*, isn't the biggest star in the world quite yet. But that doesn't stop him from being treated like it. After all, he is reportedly making \$20 million for his next film.

When the entourage from his latest movie, *XXX* (opening today), decamped at the minimalist Shore Club hotel in Miami Beach last week, there was a maximum of Hollywood -- California, not Florida -- on display. Bodyguards (in black, natch) stood by the elevators on his floor. A phalanx of foot soldiers -- headsets on and walkie-talkies ready as if awaiting orders for the invasion of Iraq -- walked the halls, quelling such emergencies as a sudden thirst for the South American beverage maté or a need for Sharpie pens.

But their biggest job seemed to be making sure the crowded press train didn't derail -- or veer anywhere off the charted path; a promised 20-minute interview, for example, was cut to 15. Photographers and writers were kept in a hospitality suite and then escorted, one by one, to the floors where two of the stars (Diesel, charismatic character actor Danny Trejo) and director Rob Cohen were holding court. Once there, chairs lined up outside their doors signified another wait. Surely, supplicants petitioning the pope have it easier.

Yet Diesel himself, drinking coffee, dressed casually, and chatting amiably, doesn't yet seem drunk on attitude and self-importance -- or he keeps it well-hidden, like some basic facts about his life. The man born Mark Vincent won't, for example, talk about his racial background. Published reports have said he's black and Italian. But he's not telling.

"For the \$20 million dude to be a multicultural actor is a phenomenon. It's never been done before," the 35-year-old says and smiles. **"For a guy to get that big in the business and never talk about his origins, and force everyone to accept him as a human being is pretty intense. It's a breakthrough."**

Certainly, the \$90 million *XXX* -- a cinematic combustion of explosions, X-Games sports, extreme music and, oh yeah, more explosions -- looks as if it's going to be Diesel's breakthrough to the superstar leagues. He plays Xander Cage, an extreme-sports enthusiast turned spy who has to take on some ultra-nasty Russian terrorists to make the world safe for democracy and half-pipes. Samuel L. Jackson is his no-nonsense boss.

The film is expected to build on the success of *The Fast and the Furious*, which put its pedal to the metal and grossed \$144.5 million in the United States alone. Like its predecessor, *XXX* -- with its orgy of PG-13 violence, stunt work, and appearances from heavy metal band Rammstein, techno twosome Orbital along with real-life extreme athletes Mat Hoffman and Brian Deegan -- is designed to tap into the 15-year-old headbanger in everyone.

For Rob Cohen, that's the point. As the man who celebrated martial arts in the movie *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* and the short-lived TV show *Vanishing Son* and brought illegal street racing to the fore in *Furious*, he likes to delve into youth subcultures. And, as a skier, he'd noticed the growth of snowboarding.

"The idea that I was watching was like the illegal street racing, it was a subculture that was forcing its style, its ideas, its passions, its language, forward into the mainstream," explains the 53-year-old director. **"Once I hook into the subculture idea, I'm there. I love all new ideas. If it's new, I'm alert. If it challenges authority, I love it. . . I love hip-hop. I love the new rock 'n' roll, which is hard like *Hatebreed*."**

In fact, it was Cohen's enthusiasm for XXX that roped in Diesel. The actor didn't want to do it at first because he thought the original script was weak. **"He convinced me the same way he always gets me, conceptually," Diesel says. "And then it's about getting there and making that script as good as possible."**

It took Diesel about 10 weeks of extreme-sports training before filming could commence. But then Diesel decided to do some of his own stunts -- which resulted in bruises and pain but nothing life-threatening.

Of course, none of this -- the stunts, the bruises, the \$20 million -- might have been possible without Steven Spielberg. After all, Diesel was just another hopeful face in the acting crowd when the 1994 20-minute short subject, Multi-Facial, directed by and starring Diesel, was shown at Cannes. That impressed the likes of director Ben Younger, who cast him in the low-budget ensemble thriller Boiler Room, and director Brad Bird who used his voice in the animated The Iron Giant. But when Spielberg cast him in Saving Private Ryan, Diesel's stock soared.

Diesel says Multi-Facial, about an out-of-work, multiracial actor, was borne out of frustration. **"I had studied acting and (work) was not happening,"** he recalls. **"I had gone to college as an English major so I could learn how to write screenplays just in case this problem would arise and it did arise. So I saved \$3,000, I wrote a script and I found myself having to learn how to direct it."**

After Ryan came the low-cost, made-in-Australia sci-fi/horror flick Pitch Black which is, ironically, spawning his \$20 million payday. He's getting the big bucks for the sequel, Riddick, named after his Pitch Black character. He will also be seen shortly in the 2-year-old Knockaround Guys, a mob drama that's been sitting on the shelf. He's also set to finish work on another action-adventure film, Diablo, due out in 2003.

But what he's most excited about is his biopic on Hannibal, the Carthaginian general who waged war on ancient Rome and shares at least one thing with Diesel: People still argue over his exact racial background. **"All this success has brought me to a place where I can bring to life a dream, a character I always wanted to play, Hannibal,"** Diesel says.

Apparently there are other Hannibal projects in the works but Diesel doesn't care. **"Everyone can make it as far as I'm concerned. . . There can be 12 Hannibals,"** he says. **"But I'm making my movie. I was born to play that role."**

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Diesel powers action hero performances

[Ventura County Star](#)

By Ivor Davis

August 9, 2002

Hollywood's action heroes are aging fast. Willis, Schwarzenegger, Stallone, Harrison Ford and even Mel Gibson are edging inexorably toward the sunset. Pierce Brosnan, who appears in his next James Bond epic later this year, is about to turn 50 ... which leaves a vacancy -- one Vin Diesel is poised to fill.

Despite sounding more like a grade of crude oil than a movie star, Diesel has become a powerful screen presence.

Diesel (his real name is Mark Vincent) made his first stage appearance when he was 7, in "Dinosaur's Door" at The Theatre for the New City in Greenwich Village.

He is reported to be half African-American and half Italian-American, but he deliberately keeps his ethnic origins under wraps. (A little mystery never hurt a would-be star.) His stepfather ran a local repertory company; his mother was part psychologist, part astrologist. He has a twin brother, Paul Vincent, who is a film editor.

He dropped out of Hunter College after three years and in 1995 wrote "Multi-Facial," a short film based on his own experience as a struggling actor. It was accepted for the Cannes Film Festival, where it earned raves.

Diesel moved to L.A., raised \$50,000 and in 1997 made his first feature, "Strays," playing an amorous drug pusher. Not long after, Steven Spielberg, impressed by "Multi-Facial," hired him for "Saving Private Ryan."

In 1999, Diesel was the stockbroker with a decent streak opposite Giovanni Ribisi in "The Boiler Room" and in 2000, the psychotic outer space killer in the stylish "Pitch Black," now something of a cult classic.

He was the leader of the illegal street racers who robbed trucks in director Rob Cohen's eardrum-crippling "The Fast and The Furious," which racked up almost \$150 million in North America, and now he returns for

Cohen as the centerpiece of the \$90 million "XXX," as the heavily tattooed superathlete Xander Cage, recruited by the National Security Agency to infiltrate a band of Russian revolutionaries.

This is the anti Bond. Cage wouldn't know a dry martini from a Jell-O shot.

Diesel, now 35, has become a hot property and is planning to play Hannibal in a new movie. ... That's Hannibal as in Carthage, not to be confused with Hannibal the cannibal.

How do you feel about becoming a new action star?

I'm going to approach every role with the same conviction. If the roles that I play are in action movies, cool, great, so be it. Wonderful; I love it.

The more famous you become, the more people want to know about you.

I'm probably fighting a losing battle and am foolish to think I can keep my personal family life private. But right now I steer away from personal questions.

Did you have a rough, tough upbringing?

My father sacrificed a lot to raise us. We were poor but I had a rich childhood in other ways. My parents always found a way to make things work and education was always important. We never owned a car and we weren't taking trips. But I did go to \$14 camp -- \$14 bucks and a towel was all you needed. I always resented that line, "We don't have enough money."

Were you ever broke?

Always. I always hustled. There was a point in my life when I wouldn't buy clothes unless I could return them, so I'd shop at the Gap or something and, if things got really hairy at the end of the month, I could return the shirt.

You said working as a nightclub bouncer in New York was great preparation for movies. What did you mean?

For eight years I was a bouncer in nightclubs and it was then I began working out and bulking up. I had to build up a kind of formidable presence that I never had as kid. And somewhere along the line, that presence emerged.

Do bouncers and big-screen heroes have a lot in common?

You do the job without weaponry, a badge or the law. You have to be resourceful and commanding and be in control without action. You set a tone in a job that can be dangerous. ... You're trying to provide a safe environment for people to have fun in -- so in a way that's kind of heroic. That's being a real bodyguard -- and in a way you're a superhero.

What's your reaction to all this sex symbol business?

I can only do the work. I can't control what people think or how people will categorize it later.

Rob Cohen says there's nobody who wants to be a movie star more than you. What do you do to make it happen?

I stay as proactive as possible. Where someone else could sit back and just watch "XXX" unfold, I'm scrambling to get "Hannibal" written, or I'm working the story meetings, trying to turn what would have been a sequel to "Pitch Black" into a trilogy.

Were you a thrill-seeker as a teen, like your "XXX" character?

I did stupid things.

Such as?

In New York, we did really dumb things, some I won't even tell you about because I don't want anyone to read it and do it.

What's one that's not so bad?

You mean, one that's not hanging from a 14th-story roof?

You did that?

We did some stupid s--- ... jumping from rooftop to rooftop. I don't even want to put it in print because, God forbid ...

So why did you do it?

I was a kid, a little boy, and it was New York adolescence. We used to do things with our rollerblades, like hold on to the back of a cab and go like 50 mph in packed traffic down Columbus or Eighth Avenue.

Are you worried that kids will see the movie and try to imitate some of what you do?

If they had the access to a drug farm, yeah, I'd be worried.

When did you realize you were going to be in movies?

As far back as I can remember, I used to read these actors' biographies where someone would say, "Yeah, young Marlon Brando always walked around the house and entertained the family." But you don't believe it. I've always believed that someday I would get to a place where I could make movies and where I could green-light pictures.

How do you feel about being termed a multicultural actor?

When I was growing up, actors were either this or that. They had very clear orders and there was little room for multicultural parts. It's fascinating to be an actor who isn't any specific thing, or type, but a human being. And I'll always be a happy and content guy to be that kind of actor.

What made you decide to tackle Hannibal the Conqueror, a guy from the third century B.C.?

It's one of the most amazing stories ever told. There's a multitude of reasons. That's the thing I'm most excited about. I could talk to you for about three hours about that one.

You wrote and directed "Multi-Facial." Do you want to get back to more introspective movies like that?

Absolutely. I'm meeting Steven Spielberg about turning it into a feature-length film.

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XXX Appeal

[People.com](#)

Aug 9

Big, bad Vin Diesel motors from nightclub bouncer to action hero.

The trapdoors, the scenery, the props: To 7-year-old Mark Vincent, Manhattan's Theater for the New City looked like a great playground. After slipping in an open door one day, he and some friends were happily wreaking havoc when artistic director Crystal Field spotted them and persuaded them to try acting instead of acting up. **"I thought she was going to call the cops,"** he recalls. **"She** said, 'If you guys want to play here, come every day at four o'clock and learn your lines.' "

Vincent has been performing ever since -- only these days, it's with bigger biceps and a macho moniker: Vin Diesel. After accelerating into Hollywood's fast lane last year as a charismatic car thief in *The Fast and the Furious*, Diesel, 35, is steering for big-budget action stardom as a skydiving, snowboarding superspy in the new thriller *XXX*. Diesel's bad-boy roles **"set him up perfectly to become a new kind of action hero,"** says costar Samuel L. Jackson. **"There's an air of mystery and danger about Vin, but he also has a little bit of the just-like-us quality."**

Credit his melting-pot background (part African-American, part Italian-American) and his more-than-just-muscles appeal: **"He's smart,"** says his *XXX* love interest, Asia Argento, who adds that he often **"explained the scene and what my character was thinking. There was a director quality there."**

But first came the daredevil quality. Raised in Manhattan by his mother, Delora, 58, an astrologer, and stepdad Irving, 67, a drama teacher, Diesel (who never met his biological father and has a twin, Paul, a film editor) was a fearless boy. **"We used to do things with our Rollerblades like hold onto the back of a cab and go, like, 50 mph,"** he says. At 17 he began working as a bouncer at trendy nightclubs like the Tunnel, for which he adopted his alias. **"He would come in on his nights off and dance by himself,"** says ex-Tunnel manager Ricky Marcado. **"People would stop and watch him."**

Diesel scraped by juggling Off-Broadway roles with bouncing and selling lightbulbs as a telemarketer. **"I'd shop at the Gap, and if things got really hairy at the end of the month I could return the shirt,"** he says. Then in 1995 *Multi-Facial*, a short film he wrote, directed and starred in about his problems getting cast because of his ethnic looks, screened at Cannes. Steven Spielberg saw it and tapped Diesel for a role in 1998's *Saving Private Ryan*. After turns in 2000's *Boiler Room* and *Pitch Black* came *Furious*, which grossed more than \$140 million and widened the cult following for the guy with the shiny pate. For the record, **"I'm**

actually getting kind of thin in some areas," admits Diesel.

That's quite all right with Czech model Pavla Hrbkova, 18, whom the actor began dating around February after she was hired for a small role in XXX. She has been spending the summer with Diesel in L.A., though he'll leave soon to start shooting a series of sequels to Pitch Black. He's also set for a follow-up to XXX for which he'll earn an A-list-worthy \$20 million. **"I wanted everything I am right now,"** he says of his success. **"I planned and I worked hard. ... I love what I do."**

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Even Tom Hanks wants his sweat pants

[Star Telegram](#)

2002-08-09

Vin Diesel, whose real name is Mark Vincent, has been deliberately vague about the details of his own life, including his decision to change his name.

"I was born in a gas station," teases the explosive star of XXX. **"They didn't have any water, so they used diesel fuel to help deliver me. From then on I was known as Diesel."**

He actually grew up in Manhattan's bohemian West Village, the son of an astrologer and a theater teacher who encouraged his interest in acting. He dropped out of college to become a nightclub bouncer and later sold hardware by telephone. Even after moving to Hollywood to pursue acting full time, he struggled to find work.

"I think the thing that actually hurt me in my earlier years in Hollywood was my experience as a bouncer," Diesel says. **"When you're a bouncer, you speak with a certain strength, because you're usually facing someone who's being difficult. It's hard to leave that strength behind, even when you come into a room to audition for a role and say 'Hi.' There's sort of a veiled threat like, 'If you don't cast me, I'm going to hurt you.' "**

Diesel, who now commands a reported \$20 million payday, will next be seen in Diablo, playing an undercover D.E.A. agent, and is about to begin production on Riddick, a sequel to his breakout movie, Pitch Black.

He's learned to be wary of people drawn to him only because of his fame.

"When I was shooting Saving Private Ryan," he recalls, **"I was wearing a pair of sweat pants, and Tom Hanks said to me, 'I like those sweat pants, man, where can I get those?'"**

"I said, 'They cost 40 bucks, but you could get them for free. They'll send you boxes of them,' " he continues. **"Tom said, 'No, I'd rather just pay the 40 bucks, no strings attached.'"**

"I had no idea what he was talking about," Diesel says. **"Now that I have a little fame of my own, I understand."**

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Diesel walked away from a cheque THIS BIG

By BRUCE KIRKLAND --

[Toronto Sun](#)

HOLLYWOOD -- Vin Diesel turned down more money than any other actor in history -- in excess of \$20 million US -- when he refused to do the sequel to The Fast And The Furious.

At least that's what his agents said, Diesel told The Toronto Sun in an interview for his new action picture, XXX. The movie opens across North America today and is expected to become one of the summer's biggest hits.

"I don't like to be bought," Diesel said defiantly. **"I have real issues with stuff like that, you know. My father (his stepdad, because his real father is out of his life) raised me as pretty much a stand-up guy."**

Diesel likes to talk about his confidence, which steeled him to try to make sense of his growing stardom at age 35 and learn to say no, even with a staggering offer on the table for The Fast And The Furious 2.

"This is the kind of confidence I'm talking about, to walk away from independent wealth to do the right kind of work. Because it was more than \$20 million. It was probably more than anyone has ever turned down. I don't know, but that's what the agents were telling me. It was like huge amounts of money and the back end (in which he would also get multi-millions more in a percentage of box office) would have gone through the roof! But what was I going to do?"

He said no. So did the director, Rob Cohen, and the two moved on to XXX together.

The Fast And The Furious 2 is still in the planning stages without them, and without Michelle Rodriguez, too. She told The Sun last month that she felt underused and exploited in the first movie and had no intention of wasting her time on a sequel.

As for XXX, Cohen calls it "the real sequel" to The Fast And The Furious, in terms of star power, action and intensity.

"You know what?" Diesel said, "that makes a lot of sense. It is very much the sequel to The Fast And The Furious. You almost don't need to make another film.

"I kind of wish they wouldn't do one, either. You're not supposed to do sequels to films you weren't planning to do sequels for from the beginning. When I did XXX, I knew I was creating a character that would live on. That's the idea. That is why I put every drop of blood into it."

Diesel says he is already signed for the XXX sequel. He has also committed to making a trilogy of films, The Chronicles Of Richard Riddick, as a spin-off from the sci-fi movie Pitch Black.

So, turning The Fast And The Furious into another continuing franchise would be absurd for him, he says.

"I can't do three of them! You know what I mean? I think that would be too much. I've got to be careful. The money may look good but ...

"Tom Hanks (with whom Diesel worked in Steven Spielberg's triumphant Saving Private Ryan) said the most important thing to learn in this business is how to say no."

Diesel learned and says he feels no guilt, despite the pressures from the studio system. Otherwise, he said, **"then I buy into the money aspect of it and then I threaten the power that I have. And the power that I have -- or that I like to believe I have -- comes from the confidence and the dedication to the work.**

"The reality is that I have enough money (and he knows more will come, much more). I'm not really worried about the money. But my artistic integrity is important."